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THE CANON IN RESIDENCE



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THE CANON IN RESIDENCE

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THE CANON IN RESIDENCE

CHAPTER I

THE Reverend John Smith, Vicar of Market Shapborough, got out of the little narrow gauge train at Thusis, gave his Gladstone bag into the hands of a porter, and strolled up the steep ascent from the station to the "Hotel des Postes," pausing now and again to admire the ruby glow of the sunset on the snowy peaks of mountains that towered above the valley through which he had just been journeying.

There was nothing particularly striking about the Reverend John Smith, any more than his name. He was a middle-aged man of medium height, dressed very correctly as an English clergyman. His hair was just a little tinged with grey, as were also his short side-whiskers. The rest of his face was clean shaven and of rather an ecclesiastical cast, but there was that half-apparent upward turn in the corners of his mouth that told he was by no means devoid of humour, while his eyes were distinctly of a kindly type.

He was not unknown in the Clerical world. There are pages of "Smith" in *Crockford*, but this

particular one, who was Vicar of Market Shapborough, a small town on the outskirts of the Diocese of Frattenbury, had a list of books of which he was the author after his name, and by the titles of them, it was easy to see that Ecclesiastical History was his hobby. In fact, Smith's "Frankfort Controversies" was well known as a text-book, and his treatise on "Some Aspects of the Reformation in Switzerland" had been described by a certain learned bishop as being "the work of one who had a thorough grasp of the Continental ecclesiastical intrigues of the sixteenth century."

It was this literary hobby of his that had brought him to Switzerland. He had taken a few weeks' holiday in the slack period between Epiphany and Lent, leaving his parish in charge of his curate, and had run over to Zürich for the purpose of consulting certain dry old tomes in the library of that city, to get information for the book he was now engaged in writing. Here he found, to his no small satisfaction, that his reputation had preceded him; and so courteous and kindly were the authorities, that his notebook was full of the information he required long before his time was up.

So, having about ten days to spare, he had determined to put in some of them at St Moritz, and having got as far on the road as Thusis, was looking forward to the wintry drive over the Julier Pass the following day.

At this particular time of the year the hotels at Thusis can boast of but few guests, and those only passing travellers staying for just the night on their way. There were one or two other passengers besides Mr Smith, but they evidently were not bound for the "Hotel des Postes," and when he walked up the steps he saw that he was the only arrival.

There was a solitary individual seated in the hall smoking a cigar, with a cup of coffee by his side. He was a man of about the same build and height as the clergyman, but of a very different type. He was dressed in a suit of a loud check pattern, he had brilliant, turnover stockings beneath his knickerbockers, and a large gold pin flashed out from a gaudy-coloured tie. He wore a heavy, dark moustache, and was, in all respects, the sort of man that at a glance one would have put down as a typical British tourist of a class to be met with all over the Continent. One cannot go up the Rhine on a summer's day, one cannot take a trip on the Italian Lakes in spring, one cannot go inside a cathedral without meeting such men, similarly dressed. The foreign hotel keeper knows them well, and invariably charges them a couple of francs or so per day above his usual *pension* price, because he knows he will get it—these men being Britishers abroad with purses.

He looked up quickly at the entry of the clergy-

man, taking stock of him with eyes that were sharp and alert. He surveyed him narrowly from head to foot, with a restless, apprehensive expression, which only passed from his face when Mr Smith addressed the proprietor, who bustled up to him, welcoming him in very fair English.

Mr Smith said: "Er—can I have a bed?"

He said it in the tone of voice of an English clergyman, a tone that no other profession ever adopts. An expert in human nature can sit with his back to an hotel entrance when a host of tourists comes rushing for rooms from an incoming train, and he will pick out the English parson abroad nine times out of ten by the simple intonation of his voice as he asks for a bed.

Perhaps it reminds one of the Litany monotoned.

Anyhow the stranger smiled slightly as he heard the question put, and went on sipping his coffee tranquilly. The Reverend John Smith was immediately taken upstairs by mine host, and shown room Number 9, which he was assured was the best in the house.

It was not; but room Number 10 had already been ascribed to the individual in the hall. Both rooms were warmed by the same stove, and mine host charged each guest for warming.

They are hotel keepers by instinct in Switzerland.

The Reverend John Smith made up his mind not to dress for dinner. Enough that he was in

black. He turned on the electric light, undid his bag—which the hotel porter brought up—and took out a few requisites. After a leisurely toilet he produced a large manuscript book from the bag and perused it with much satisfaction until the bell rang for dinner. It was his book of Zürich notes.

At table he met the other man. He, too, had not troubled to dress. The two sat face to face; they were the only guests. Being English, they ate in silence half through the meal. Then Mr Smith had to ask the other to pass the salt. He hesitated, but the waiter had left the room for something—and he wanted salt. Having asked for it, and thanked his companion for passing it, he felt the silence ought no longer to be maintained. Etiquette had been satisfied without formal introduction. Of course, for the next ten minutes the conversation was confined strictly to the weather—its present state, its biography in past years and seasons, and its probabilities on the morrow. Then Mr Smith grumbled at Swiss railways, and the stranger abused the hotel wine. This put them on a more friendly footing, and the conversation became general.

They went into the hall together, lit cigars—for Mr Smith was fond of a smoke—and chatted quite familiarly. The stranger was a well-informed man, and was able to tell his companion much about St Moritz and the winter season there. Then

the conversation took a slightly ecclesiastical turn. Something was said about the clergy, and the stranger made the remark :

"It's a pity so many of them are not men of the world: excuse my saying so."

Mr Smith smiled.

"I don't think you laymen do us justice," he said. "There isn't a class of men with such opportunities of getting a knowledge of human nature as the clergy."

"And there isn't a class of men who use their opportunities less—at least I think so."

"Oh, come now. Just think a little. We are always mixing with all sorts and conditions of men, from the highest," and here he drew himself up a little when he thought of his yearly dinner with an Earl who lived in his parish, "down to the very lowest," and he blew the smoke complacently from his mouth as he pictured himself visiting the one "slummy" street of Market Shap-borough.

"I know, and I give you full credit for it. Don't think I'm running the parsons down, though," and his eyes twinkled, "I can't say I see very much of them myself. But although you may be mixing with all sorts and conditions of men, between you and the laity there is a great gulf fixed. I don't want to draw invidious distinctions from Scripture as to the different sides of the gulf."

"I don't quite follow you," replied Mr Smith with slight acerbity.

"No? Well, frankly, I mean this. By virtue of your office and your uniform—that collar of yours, for instance—you create, shall we say, a halo around you. That's the gulf."

"Well, but it is only right that we should do this. Whatever we may be ourselves," and he dropped unconsciously into his sermon tones, "our office ought to be respected."

"But you can't fathom human nature unless you occasionally get outside that office. Let me put it to you. Suppose you go suddenly into a group of laymen who are talking, say, of perfectly innocent subjects. The feeling comes over them at once, 'Hullo, here's a parson—we must be careful what we say,' and their conversation changes from a natural one to a more or less forced one. You may think you're getting at their human nature by listening, but you're not. They are on their best behaviour. Best behaviour is not generally human nature; come now!"

Mr Smith was bound to laugh.

"Oh, there's something in what you say," he admitted; "but then, as I remarked, our office ought to be respected. Suppose I entered a railway carriage where half-a-dozen men were using bad language. You wouldn't have them go on swearing in my presence, would you?"

"It wouldn't do you any harm if they did. Of course they wouldn't swear—more's the pity!"

"More's the pity?"

"Certainly. They'd either be silent or make remarks calculated to deceive you. And you'd be impressed with the guilelessness of the working class, and sum up human nature accordingly, bringing it into your next Sunday sermon. Whereas if they went on swearing you'd be able to form a better estimate of humanity, and preach them a better sermon on the spot—if you dared."

Mr Smith took it good-naturedly, but was on his defence.

"I still maintain," said he, "that my presence in the railway carriage would be a salutary check on those men."

"Yes—for half an hour. And then, when you were gone, there would be an exhibition of human nature—at your expense. That's what I complain of—a salutary check! My dear sir, it isn't simply a matter of half-a-dozen louts stopping their tongues. It's more than this. Your office, and the artificial respect for it, prevent you from ever getting hold of thousands of opinions and thoughts, speculations and convictions. You churchmen are in a fool's paradise, and the hedge round it is the 'respect for your office.' Some day that hedge will be cut down—from outside. And then you'll see."

"You are candid—very candid," said the clergy-

man slowly. For a minute or two he smoked in silence and with contracted brows. He was not accustomed to have things thrust upon him thus. It was unlike the speeches of laymen at church conferences and opinions expressed in the correspondence of the *Guardian*. The other watched him with an amused smile, much enjoying the situation.

Presently Mr Smith remarked :

"Most people are able to pull down prevailing systems, but few can suggest remedies of any consequence. You say that we clergy do not sufficiently understand men. Perhaps you can tell me how to do it."

"Easily."

"How?"

The stranger leaned forward and touched the other's coat.

"Take off this," he said, "and that," he went on, pointing to Mr Smith's collar; "put on ordinary clothes and drop the parson. Then go and mix with men—and you'll see I'm right."

Mr Smith coloured slightly.

"Really," he said, "you would not have me go about my parish of Market Shapborough dressed—er—well, like yourself?"

And he smiled, in spite of himself, at such an idea as his eyes fell on the loud check suit.

The other laughed heartily.

"No, not even this," and he indicated his jacket "would disguise you in your own parish. But I didn't mean that. I referred to the times you are out of your parish. For instance, you are going to spend a week at St Moritz just at the height of the winter season. There would have been a glorious opportunity for you to become a layman for the time being. You'll meet all sorts there—snobs, scientists, opinions of the brainy and opinions of the brainless. It's a little world in itself. You lose your chance of making the best of it by going there as a parson."

Mr Smith was silent, remembering the stern rebuke he had once administered to his curate when he had discovered that the latter had donned "mufti" for his Continental holiday. There was something in what the stranger said, after all. Deep down in Mr Smith's heart, almost smothered by years of ecclesiasticism and respectability, there still lurked a few grains of that spirit of adventurous enquiry that is the heritage of those of northern climes.

And, really, now he came to think of it, he could recall more than one instance of the truth of the stranger's words, instances when he had actually employed a layman to investigate certain parochial matters which he had felt that he could not quite grasp; simple things, but telling arguments at this moment.

How long he would have mused over the matter one cannot undertake to say, for at this moment the waiter appeared, bringing an English newspaper and requesting orders for the morrow.

"Get me a seat in the *coupé* for St Moritz," said Mr Smith, "and call me in time to get some breakfast before starting. My room is Number 9."

"Yes, Monsieur," said the waiter, who spoke a jargon of many languages. "And Monsieur?" he questioned, turning to the other.

"All right, I'll give you my orders before I go to bed."

With a polite gesture, the stranger in check motioned his companion to make first use of the newspaper. It was two or three days old, but the first he had seen for a week, so occupied had he been at Zürich. He opened it, half read the leading article, glanced through a column or two of general news, and then his eyes fell on the words,

"ECCLESIASTICAL INTELLIGENCE."

The very first paragraph under this heading was the following:—

"We are authorised to state that the vacant Canonry of Frattenbury Cathedral has been offered to the Rev. John Smith, Vicar of Market Shapborough, and author of 'Frankfort Controversies,' and other historical works. Mr Smith is at present on the Continent, and no reply has been received from him as yet, but there is no doubt that he will accept this recognition of his merits."

He read it slowly once, twice, and then he laid the paper down on the table, took a long draw at his cigar, and threw himself back in his chair with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Perhaps it was the most delicious moment of his life; the more delicious because the news came in the way that it did. The man had a pardonable sense of pride, and this "recognition of his merits" was sweet to his soul.

"Canon Smith!" For a few minutes he revelled in the thought, silently; and who would not forgive him? True, he had had some hopes of it. He knew, just as he left England, of the vacancy; but he had scarcely dared to think of it. Though known by his books, he had never taken any important part in the affairs of the Diocese, and his living was not a very prominent one—and poor enough! The Canonry was worth five hundred a year—riches to him. The smoke which he puffed upward seemed to take the shape of a white-robed figure preceded by a solemn verger carrying a silver wand, marching to his stall in Frattenbury Cathedral. All thoughts of the stranger by his side and the suggestion he had made faded away from him. He was more ecclesiastical than ever. He had entered the hotel as the Reverend John Smith—he would leave it as the Reverend Canon-elect. It was a position of dignity; the "recognition of his merit."

Meanwhile the stranger had taken the newspaper from the table and was perusing it in his turn.

Presently his eyes assumed the intent look of a man who is deeply interested; there was a pause between the puffs of his cigar, and he put down the sheet, muttering in a half-abstracted tone:

"Heaven be praised for the newspapers!"

Mr Smith, in his reverie, caught the words and echoed them perfectly unconsciously.

"Heaven be praised for the newspapers!" he murmured.

There was a very long silence. Mr Smith became more and more wrapped up in his dreams of Frattenbury Cathedral and Frattenbury Close, and the other man became more and more alert in his thoughts. Mr Smith's cigar had gone out. The stranger was smoking his voluminously. Gradually an idea seemed to take possession of him, and a smile displaced his frown. His eyes looked the clergyman up and down narrowly; then, as if he had quite made up his mind, he drew out his cigar-case, carefully looked over the contents, swiftly transferred all but one conspicuously dark one loose into his pocket, and then, bending forward, said:

"Your cigar has gone out, sir. Allow me to offer you another."

"Oh, thank you very much," said the clergyman, starting from his visions. "It's very good of you. Dear me, but it's your last," he added, as he drew it from the case.

"I've plenty more upstairs," replied the stranger.
"I'll go and get some."

The next minute he was on the first-floor landing. Carefully looking round to see that he was not observed, he entered room Number 9, and turned on the electric light.

As is customary in Continental hotels there was a double door leading from Number 9 to Number 10, in case they were both taken by members of the same family. Each door had its own key, on the inside. In three seconds the stranger had taken out Mr Smith's key, first unlocking the door, and put it in his pocket. He could now enter the room from his own if he liked. In another two minutes he was down once more, smoking a cigar with the clergyman.

Presently the latter said :

"This is rather a strong cigar of yours."

"Eh? I'm sorry. I do smoke rather a strong brand, I suppose."

"Well, perhaps I'm a bit tired. I've got a long journey to-morrow, and I think I'll go to bed, if you'll excuse me. Shall I see you in the morning?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Ah! Many thanks for an interesting conversation. But I'm afraid I don't agree with you, you know. That idea of yours about lay clothes——"

"Try it!"

Mr Smith laughed.

"It will have to be some other time if I ever do—which isn't likely," and he thought of the Canonry.

"I wish I could make you go to St Moritz dressed as I am. I should be doing you a service, really!"

"No doubt, no doubt—good-night to you!"

"Good-night, sir. A pleasant journey to-morrow."

Mr Smith went off to bed very tired, very sleepy, very satisfied, and very amused at the bantering stranger. He undressed quickly and yawningly, praised God sleepily for the Canonry, and was soon snoring.

The other man called for paper and ink, wrote a letter which seemed to amuse him vastly, and then interviewed the waiter.

"There's a train at five A.M., isn't there?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Call me at four; breakfast at twenty past. Tell the porter to carry my bag to the station, and to get me a first-class ticket to Paris."

"Bien, Monsieur."

CHAPTER II

THE Reverend John Smith slept exceedingly soundly. It took three attacks at the door to wake him in the morning. Finally he got out of bed, drew up the blinds and shivered—for it was a Swiss winter morning.

As he prepared to dress his eyes wandered round the room. Suddenly they rested on a half-familiar object. Neatly folded, and hanging over the back of a chair, was a very loud check suit.

"Thought I'd locked my door," he muttered, "but I suppose I hadn't, and they took my clothes to brush. I never heard them."

He smiled at the mistake of the servants and made for the electric bell. But, as he did so, he caught sight of a note pinned on the awful coat.

"TO MY REVEREND TRAVELLING COMPANION."

In astonishment he tore it open and read:—

"MY VERY DEAR SIR,—The vagaries of the strange world in which we live are responsible for the vagaries of the individual. I put a course of action before you to-night, and the contrary argu-

ment has struck home to me. You have hitherto viewed the world as a parson—I as a layman. How intensely interesting to change places and learn from the experience! I am a creature of impulses, and, fortunately for the experiment, we are about the same build! I not only maintain the truth of the old proverb that ‘exchange is no robbery,’ but I make no apologies for conferring a benefit upon you. You asked me how you could judge the world from a different standpoint. I not only told you, but I give you, at once, the opportunity of doing so. I shall ever rejoice in having helped a fellow-creature, and I am sure you will learn to thank me as I deserve. Personally, I anticipate much pleasure in acting as becomes my new position; you have already given me more than one hint.

“*P.S.*—Under the circumstances a signature is superfluous. By the way, one of the coat buttons is rather loose, and should be sewn on as soon as possible.”

To say that the man who read this extraordinary effusion was astonished, would fail to portray his feelings as he stood in his night attire realising the awful circumstances. Hastily throwing on some underclothing he rang the bell, and enquired angrily as to the whereabouts of this terrible individual.

“Monsieur left by the early train for Paris more than three hours since,” said the man. “Is there anything wrong?”

"Yes—no—never mind," fumed the other; "I will dress and see the proprietor."

"Monsieur will not forget to have his bag ready for the *diligence*? There is not much time."

It was all very well to say he would dress, but the question was, what should he put on? He bethought him of his clerical dress suit with its high waistcoat, but even that had disappeared except the trousers—and a stylish lay dress coat and waistcoat had been substituted. His very collars had gone, and some of a strange shape, together with some bright-coloured ties, were in their place. His pocket-book—no—that was all right, nothing missing from it. The loose cash he had left in his pockets lay in a little heap on the table. At least the rascal was honest.

"Breakfast is ready!"

He made a compromise. He put on the black evening-dress trousers, struggled into the least gaudy of the ties, and then clothed himself with the terrible coat and waistcoat, cramming all the other things into his Gladstone. He could *not* descend to the knickerbockers.

In spite of his irritation a smile broke over his face as he caught sight of himself in the glass. Legs and head ecclesiastical; body and throat sporting. It was the man's saving side that he had a sense of humour which at times got the ascendancy. It did now.

"Canon of Frattenbury!" A verger would have thrown his silver staff on the ground and fled. The Dean——

When he thought of the Dean of Frattenbury, whom he had occasionally met, he laughed out loud.

The smile fled from his face. He had to confront the world below. Over all he put on the dark great-coat which had been left to him, and buttoned it up. His clerical hat had disappeared, but he had a travelling cap—besides a check one left with the suit.

He read the letter through again and crammed it into his pocket. A flush suffused his face.

How they would laugh at him down below! It was a joke, he supposed; the impertinent letter said as much. A wretched, miserable joke—an insulting joke, carried a great deal too far.

"But the world will look upon it as a joke, all the same," whispered his Pride, "and you will pose as a laughing-stock."

Rapidly he turned it over in his mind as he went downstairs. He took his seat wrapped up as he was, at the breakfast table, began his meal, and asked for the proprietor.

"Monsieur wants to see me?"

In fancy the man's face seemed even now broadening into a grin. He hesitated.

"The gentleman who was here last night—he has gone?"

"To Paris, Monsieur; he is already nearly four hours on the journey."

"Er—what is his name?"

"Monsieur shall see the Register."

The next minute it was before him.

"Henry Jones, London, England."

"We have had others of his family," remarked the proprietor, running his finger up the Register to find out Jones's of former visits. "Perhaps Monsieur knows his family in England, yes? But it is a large one!"

"I know nothing about him at all!" snapped the other. "I only wish I could lay my hands upon him, that's all."

"So! But it is not possible to shake hands with him. But he left a message for Monsieur. He said to me to give his regards, and to say that the fine feather makes the bird fine. He said Monsieur would understand!"

Monsieur *did* understand, and grew redder in the face. At this moment the waiter rushed in to say that the *diligence* was at the door, and the bag safely perched therein. Hastily he paid the bill, and stood for a moment undecided. But he could not face the situation, and he kept his overcoat buttoned. Before he could see a way to escape from this terrible dilemma he had mechanically taken his seat in the *coupé*, and the lumbering vehicle was off with a great whip-cracking, the proprietor bowing on the steps and shouting, "Adieu!"

The Reverend John Smith, Canon-elect of Frattenbury, heeded not the magnificent scenery that broke around him as Thusis was left behind. He was grappling earnestly with a problem, a problem that harassed his dignity in the extreme. Presently he lit his morning pipe, and felt better for it, as every man does. Once or twice the palpable absurdity of the situation brought a twitching to his lips, to be followed by a frown of reflection.

At length he began to see a way through the trouble. He reasoned it out somewhat after this fashion. It would be foolish to attempt to trace this Henry Jones. It would only make him ridiculous if the story got out. A position of some prominence awaited him in England, and it would never do for the Press to publish the unfortunate incident, as it very likely might do—with embellishments, if the facts of the case ever got abroad. His wisest course, if he wished to avoid being a laughing-stock, was to get quickly back to England *incognito*, go straight home in his travelling coat, and hide those miserable garments for ever—unless he had an opportunity of returning them some day to Mr Henry Jones with a strong piece of his mind. Very well, then. He would make the best of an unfortunate position, go on now to St Moritz, leave the next day, perhaps, and travel home *via* the Maloja, and the St Gothard. No one but himself need ever know.

His pipe began to taste more fragrant as his mind

became somewhat at rest. The scenery began to grow upon him, and the keen, frosty mountain air began to exhilarate his whole being. His ridiculous position worried him less.

"I must make the best of it, that's all," he soliloquised; "and, above all, I mustn't forget that, for the time being, I'm only a layman."

Moreover, being an Englishman, and the circumstances having to be surmounted, the spirit of adventure rose up to grip him. Wherefore he found himself saying that perhaps, after all, he might spend a day or two in St Moritz, and not hurry away the next morning.

Then the spirit of adventure took a firmer grip.

"Well, well," he reasoned, "it may be an opportunity of learning something."

Whereupon the *diligence* drew up at Tiefenkastel, and he got out, went into the hotel to warm himself, and to make up for rather a poor breakfast. Mechanically he unbuttoned his coat and stood revealed. A young man in a white Engadiner cap and a fur-lined coat was ensconced behind a large mug of beer. He nodded affably.

"Cold morning," he said. "If you're ordering anything let me give you a tip. The whisky's deuced bad here."

A sudden *hauteur* assailed the good cleric. For a moment his face was a silent rebuke. Then he remembered himself and replied:

"Thanks. But I'm having coffee, and something to eat. I was rather hurried at Thusis this morning, and had no time to finish breakfast."

Thus John Smith praised the Rubicon, while the other said to himself, being one who thought himself worldly shrewd :

"Must have hurried up, too. Got his evening bags on! Been keeping it up a bit last night!"

Possibly it was the effect of that carefully selected cigar, coupled with what he was passing through, but his face did look a trifle "washed out."

"Going through to St Moritz, I suppose?" jerked out the stranger.

"Yes."

"*Coupeé*?"

"Yes."

"So'm I. They'll put us in a sleigh at Mühlen. It'll be deuced cold over the Pass to-day."

"I suppose so."

"Not been there before, eh?"

"Not in the winter."

"Thought not. I'm an 'old resident,' as we call 'em. This is my fourth season."

They have a saying among the sporting set at St Moritz that the first year you lose your hair; the second, your manners; and the third, your character. This youth was an apparent proof. You also grow either patronising or snubby towards newcomers, the distinction being this: If you are

alone with them you are patronising ; if other "old St Moritzers" are present you are snubby. This is correct form. In this case the youth was, of course, patronising.

"And do you come out for your health?" asked John Smith.

"Rather not. I'm not a 'lunger,' thank goodness. No ; I come out for the fun of the thing. Tobogganing and all that, you know."

Presently they both got into the *coupé*, and went lumbering on. The young man was talkative. He told his companion all about the "Cresta Run" and the times of last year's winners ; he expatiated on the pleasures of bob-sleighbing, and he grew exceedingly slangy. John Smith listened with half-amused, half-surprised interest, as the garrulous youth ran on ; and though several times he was on the point of uttering a checking word, he remembered his new *rôle*, and restrained himself. It was years since he had heard a man talk freely like this, and though it was mostly sporting drivel, and harmless enough in its way, John Smith found himself more than once reluctantly confessing that there was some truth in the remarks of the stranger of the previous evening.

At Mühlen there was a halt for a hasty meal, and then the two men found themselves in a sleigh, the driver standing on the footboard behind, smoking his thin, long cigar.

"Going to make a long stay?" asked the youth.

"No; only a day or two, I think."

"Ah! Pity you can't stop till the 'Grand National.' That's the big wind-up of the 'Cresta Run,' you know. It's worth seeing."

"Are you racing?"

"Rather! Don't stand much chance, though. I was fairly fit last season; sold for seven hundred francs."

"I—er—don't quite understand?"

"Sweepstakes, you know. Fellow that drew my name sold it for seven hundred at the auction, see? It was a girl who bought it—jolly fine girl, too. I was a bit gone on her, and then, as luck would have it, I came a mucker over the bank on my third run. So she lost her seven hundred francs. By George, and she was mad about it, too. Wouldn't speak to me for the rest of the season. Look here, I'll give you a tip. If you *do* stay on for the 'Grand National,' you just plank your cash on a chap named Fraser. He's the winner this season, for a dead cert."

"I don't bet," said John Smith unguardedly.

"No? You look a sporting man, too. Some fellows don't, though. We had a parson staying at the hotel last season. Of course he didn't bet. Well, you know, we shouldn't have thought much of him if he had."

This was a strange revelation to John Smith, this judgment of the "cloth." The youth rattled on:

"But this particular devil-dodger was so beastly sanctimonious about it. He didn't drink and he didn't smoke. Well, we'd have forgiven him that, but he paraded it about so much, with a kind of 'silent example' sort of manner. And he'd make pointed remarks at table—awfully rude, you know—remarks *at* people that you couldn't exactly lay hold of. The beggar! He knew very well that just because he was a parson you couldn't go for him and have the thing out as man to man. I do like a chap to be human, even if he wears a white choker; don't you?"

John Smith reflected for a moment, and was about to reply, when his companion went on without waiting for him:

"By George, he was a ranker! At the auction for the 'Grand National' sweep in the hotel hall he sat where every one could see him, reading an anti-betting tract with a title in big letters. Awful pity! A chap like that does a lot of harm to his own church. Of course there are decent parsons, don't you know?"

"I suppose you mean the sporting variety?" hazarded John Smith, whose curiosity was struggling with his clerical dignity.

"Oh, not exactly," answered the youth; "I know a fellow at home who's never been on a horse or handled a gun or that sort of thing all his life. Works in the slums, and rather likes it. But he's

a *man* all the time. That makes the difference. I'd stand a ragging from him, while I'd feel like punching the other beggar's head if he looked at me. Hullo, we're getting on—jolly near the Pass now. It's a good grind up."

Gradually the bare firs and larches had become thinner and thinner until now they had entirely disappeared, and there was nothing to relieve the dazzling white monotony of snow except the gigantic peaks towering in the foreground, and catching the last rays of the afternoon sun. The silence was intense, only broken by the everlasting tinkle of the horse's bells as the sleigh went on between the high banks of snow on either side. It was a toilsome pull-up to the top of the Pass, and John Smith was not sorry for the few minutes' rest inside the stuffy little hospice at the top, and the cup of hot coffee which made its appearance.

He was getting a little tired of his journey. His companion was beginning to bore him with his chatter, and he felt almost an aversion towards him. At the same time, he could not help confessing to himself that it was a novel experience to meet with this unrestrained familiarity. Once or twice he found himself wondering how this young man would have treated him had he known his position, and then he fell to comparing himself with this obnoxious cleric of whom he had heard. Well, perhaps he *was* a little less of a prig and more

"human." At all events he liked his pipe, and a glass of wine in moderation. But he hated gambling. And yet this callow youth had said that it was *not* the man's anti-betting proclivities which were disagreeable, but his manner of showing them. Thus John Smith found himself working out a problem. Where was the exact line of moral influence to be drawn? And the solution seemed to lie in the following:—"First probe the ground to be influenced." Yes—that was the mistake this unknown cleric had made. He had not understood rightly the men around him: obviously he had not understood this youth, because, by the latter's confession, he was capable of being influenced.

And then, the argument of the previous evening flashed across him. This was exactly the charge which that detestable practical joker had brought against him! It was too absurd.

So he gave it up for the time, and began admiring the scenery. As they sped down the other side of the Pass, the Engadine mountains with the grand Bernina Range beyond opened out their wondrous vista. From delicate pink to rosy violet the peaks changed colour, ever varying as the twilight failed. He lost himself in the contemplation of Nature's marvellous greatness and beauty. He heeded not the talk of his companion.

The moon rose as they journeyed from Silva Plana along the valley, passing silent and deserted

Campfer. And presently a turn in the road brought them to a glimpse of twinkling lights through the pines, and St Moritz itself, looking in the soft moonlight like a fairy village set in the midst of some enchanted transformation scene, stood before them.

A bustle and confusion as the post came in! A dismounting and a stamping of icy feet in the crisp, crackling snow! A few directions to a porter, and John Smith wended his way to an hotel, the young man following close at his heels.

There was just time to dress before dinner. After the exhilaration of the journey John Smith's heart began to sink when he reflected upon his situation. He had qualms about it. It was downright masquerading. He threw off the hateful check coat and waistcoat, and proceeded to put on the rest of the dress garments. Then he looked at himself in the glass and shook his head, half in sorrow, half in anger.

Suppose he were to meet any one he knew? Well, the dress suit was not so bad. Many clergymen wore open waistcoats and white shirt fronts. If he *did* see any one at the table, he could take his departure the next morning.

But, unfortunately, the youth had seen his other garments! What a fool he had been! He ought to have taken measures at once that morning.

What measures? The wretched man was three

hours on his way to Paris before he found out the trick. He could never have caught him. The only thing he could have done would have been to tell the hotel proprietor everything, and then make his way back to England.

Well, he was making his way back to England *via* St Moritz. And he was doing no harm. It was a little undignified, but that was all.

And, he was learning something! In spite of himself he half admitted it. Anyhow, the spirit of adventure rose once more triumphant. He was in a fix, and, like the Englishman he was, he was determined to see it through—in spite—in spite of the fact that he was a Canon-elect of the Very Respectable Anglican Church.

Without thinking, he put his fingers into his waistcoat pockets. It was a habit of his. In one of them he felt paper. Perhaps it would give him a clue as to the owner's identity, so he pulled it out hastily.

It was crisp and thin. He unfolded it. A Bank of England note for twenty pounds!

Then the hotel bell rang for dinner.

CHAPTER III

"I WON'T ask you the conventional question, 'What sort of a journey did you have over the Pass?' I'm tired of hearing it asked. But we must begin somehow, you know, for it seems we are to be companions at table. Have you been here before?"

John Smith laid down the soup spoon he had just taken up, and looked at the girl who was sitting next to him, looked at her in some surprise, for he was unaccustomed to be spoken to by strange women thus spasmodically, even at the same dinner-table.

"Never," he replied.

"Then I'm sure you'll be all the more interesting to talk with. It's my first visit, too, and I'm foolish enough to be enthusiastic about it. You know it's the fashion for the 'old St Moritzers,' as they call themselves, to snub anything like enthusiasm — except about sport. It's such a pity, I think; don't you?"

"What kind of enthusiasm do you refer to?" he asked.

"Oh, lots of things. The freshness of it all, the

scenery, and the climate — everything. Now, for instance, that drive over the Pass—by the way, I *am* referring to it, you see—I don't think I ever enjoyed anything so much in my life, and I long to do it over again. And yet there are actually people here who can travel the whole way without noticing a thing, and who seem to think that because they've done it once they ought to be bored with it for ever afterwards. There are four men here who came over together, and boast that they played bridge the whole way. Can you imagine it?"

"No," said John Smith, "I can't. I enjoyed the journey immensely—that is, parts of it."

For he thought of the first stage, and partly of the tiring chatter of the youth.

"Have you been here long?" he added.

She turned a pair of remarkably fine dark eyes upon him, eyes that scanned his face clearly, as she replied:

"We came a fortnight before Christmas."

He looked beyond her for the "we," and noticed a quiet, grey-haired lady seated on the other side of her.

"So you are getting quite used to the life, I suppose?"

"Yes," she answered; "but the height of the season has only just begun. The sporting set don't come out much before the middle of January. It's the invalids that come early, you know."

He looked at her again, and noticed the colour on her cheeks.

"You will pardon me if I am wrong," he answered, "but at all events *you* don't look like an invalid."

"Oh, but I am, I assure you. Not a very bad one, but just sufficient to warrant a winter out here. I suppose you've come for sport?"

She glanced at him just a little curiously. He was by no means unprepossessing, and his face had a kindly expression on it. He looked what he might easily have been at the moment, a middle-aged gentleman, of no particular occupation, who had come out there to enjoy himself.

"No," he answered, "mine is only a flying visit—I may even leave to-morrow—I haven't made up my mind yet."

"Oh, don't do that! When you see the place to-morrow you won't want to tear yourself away from it in such a hurry. You must stay a week at least. What attraction shall I hold out to detain you? Skating, tobogganing, dancing — there's a dance here to-morrow night—amateur theatricals on Tuesday—or do you play bridge?"

A grim little humorous smile lit up John Smith's face at this list of temptations.

"My dear young lady," he said, "none of these things would induce me to stay. Can you offer anything else?"

"Yes. Two things. Beautiful scenery and human nature. Plenty of both."

"And which presents the greatest attraction?"

"Oh, that depends upon your bent of philosophy," she replied, with a little shrug of her shoulders. "If you are a cynic you may take the view that 'every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.' If you are broad-minded you will let both please you. But perhaps you are not a philosopher at all?"

"Well, I think you might place me in that category."

"Cynic?"

"Not exactly."

"I'm so glad. It's hateful to take the view 'that only man is vile,' isn't it? I never will sing that line in the hymn. It's positively horrid to think yourself so much better than other people. Those are the *real* vile persons—those who judge others from their own little exalted pedestal. Don't you think so?"

John Smith was beginning to wonder. It had been a day of surprises, and this bright, vivacious girl was the biggest surprise of them all, so far.

"Well," he said, "I don't know whether I exactly agree with you. No doubt pride has a lot to answer for. It's a grave sin, but——"

He stopped short.

"But what?" she asked, turning her eyes full upon him, eyes that would not be thwarted.

"There must be standpoints of judgment."

He was thinking of his own ecclesiastical position.

"I daresay. But what I object to are standpoints

of condemnation. You put it down to pride, but do you think it is always pride? In many cases it is just the want of an open mind that makes us condemn others. Prejudice has quite as much to answer for as pride—prejudice and conventionality.”

There was silence for a few minutes, during which John Smith pondered deeply. This strange young woman rather baffled him, she was so perfectly natural. Being an ecclesiastic he thought he knew much of women. So he did, in one sense of the word. But his district visitors and Sunday School teachers had perhaps never shown him quite as much of themselves during the years he had been in Market Shapborough as this girl had in the half-hour or so they had been seated at table. He had been accustomed to tacitly despise women, apart from the acknowledgment that they had their spheres of usefulness. He had rather shrunk than otherwise from any close companionship with them—apart from the conventional round of teas and social amenities in which he considered it more or less of a “pastoral duty” to figure.

He turned to her with interest as she spoke to him again. The conversation led to some political question. He was surprised to find a woman taking such a keen interest in it. A word or two she dropped on the subject brought a smile to his lips.

“You are quite a Socialist!” he exclaimed.

“Am I? Very likely; I only know I don’t

believe in the policy of 'as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be,' though that's the policy I've been brought up in."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, my father is a strict Tory of the old school. We have fearful arguments, I assure you. He's quite horrified with me at times."

"I suppose he must be," replied John Smith unthinkingly.

She laughed lightly.

"As apparently you are, too," she said. "I hope I haven't shocked your sense of conventionality—the natural right of an Englishman. Come," she added, turning to her companion, "you've finished, and I know you're thinking of coffee."

She rose from her seat, making a slight inclination to John Smith, who bowed in return, and, taking the arm of the other lady, walked out of the room.

The Canon-elect followed her with his eyes. She was rather above the middle height, well formed, and graceful. The black evening gown she was wearing, with its collaret of Venetian point lace, suited her well. Presently he got up and joined the crowd that flowed out from the *salle a manger* into the hall—the popular after-dinner resort. Here he seated himself. A babel arose. Men smoked, women talked, waiters glided through the groups with coffee and liqueurs. Presently John Smith's

travelling companion sauntered up, hands in pockets, cigar in mouth.

"Hullo," he said, "getting on all right? By the way, that beggar's here again."

"Who?"

"The parson I told you of."

He jerked his shoulder, and John Smith's eyes followed its direction. Severely alone there sat a stiff, middle-aged man, with thin, sandy whiskers, compressed lips, and frowning brow, dressed in strict clerical garb and reading an ecclesiastical newspaper, the title of which was somewhat ostentatiously displayed.

"I'd like to kick the beast!"

He sat down by John Smith. Old acquaintances came up and greeted him, flinging themselves into chairs and ordering liqueurs. By degrees John Smith found himself in the midst of quite a group of men, listening to their conversation, and now and then taking part in it. A good dinner and a good cigar work wonders. He forgot the worries of the day, and was rather enjoying himself than otherwise. He had even begun to appreciate the humour of the situation, and was quite sorry when the others made a move to the billiard-room.

He was wondering whether he should follow them, when he saw the other clergyman coming slowly towards him.

"Er—a new arrival, I see," said the latter in

stilted tones. "Had you a pleasant journey over the Pass?"

"Very, thanks," replied John Smith, feeling more uncomfortable than he had ever done in his life in meeting a fellow-cleric.

The fellow-cleric, however, evidently suspected nothing. He sat down in a chair, and John Smith began to breathe with somewhat of relief as a few commonplace observations passed between them. Presently the stranger said:

"Pardon my asking you, but do you sing?"

"Why?" asked his victim, in astonishment.

"We want a few male voices in the choir on Sundays, and I promised the Chaplain—who resides at another hotel—to ask all newcomers if they would care to join."

"I am not sure whether I shall be here for Sunday," said John Smith evasively.

"I see. You must forgive me for intruding. It is difficult to get men to come. Unhappily, most of them do not come near the church on Sundays. Please pardon me if I have touched any personal susceptibilities."

He said it in a tone of righteous semi-reproach. Then John Smith became really angry.

"Thank you," he remarked chillingly, "but as it happens, I am in the habit of attending church."

He finished his coffee, got up, and walked to the other side of the hall. He was beginning to half

appreciate the youth's desire to kick. A pair of merry brown eyes greeted him.

"I'll tell you what he said!" she exclaimed.

"Who?"

"The 'Sandy Saint'—that's what we call him. I saw him go up and introduce himself. First he asked you that conventional question I tried to avoid."

"About the journey over the Pass? Quite right."

"And before you came away he wanted to know if you would sing in the choir, and he worked in a delicate hint about church attendance."

"He did. Is that his way with newcomers?"

"Invariably. He has stopped three men to my certain knowledge from coming to church. I expect, you know, he looked upon you as a soul to be saved. Ugh! Talk about a standpoint of condemnation!"

"Eleanor, my dear, you really shouldn't say such things," remarked the old lady mildly.

"I can't help it, Mrs Findlay; I warned you I should be a handful to you before you brought me here."

From which John Smith astutely gathered that Mrs Findlay was her chaperon and companion.

"Have you a match?" the girl went on.

John Smith instinctively put his hand in his pocket and produced his little silver box. Then

he noticed that she held a dainty cigarette in her fingers.

"Don't give her one," protested Mrs Findlay. "I don't like you to smoke, Eleanor—and in public, too."

"You'd better ask the others not to set me a bad example," replied the girl coolly, and indicating with a slight motion of her head quite a dozen women who were smoking in the hall.

John Smith drew back his hand slightly.

"No," he said, "I shan't encourage you—I don't approve, and——"

"Standpoint of condemnation again!" laughed she. "The fact of the matter is, 'Sandy Saint' is watching you, and you don't like to let him see you giving me a match."

John Smith turned slightly, and saw that the man in question was fixing him with his gaze from the other side of the hall.

"Thanks!" said the girl, leaning forward, and taking the box from his hand before he was aware of it.

"Now he will think more than ever that you have a soul to be saved," she added, returning him the box, and puffing a light whiff.

John Smith shook his head uncomfortably, and walked away. But she only smiled.

"Really, dear," expostulated her chaperon, "I wish you would have more regard for proprieties. The

idea of asking a strange man like that for a match!"

"My dear Mrs Findlay," said the girl, as she leaned back in her chair and half closed her eyes, "my bargain with you was that you were not to interfere with me unless I did something desperately wicked. Wait till I do. I asked him for a match on purpose to shock him, because I think he's a man who wants educating a little. Otherwise, he's really rather nice."

When John Smith went to his room that night he found that something else was missing besides his clothes, and that was his card-case. But it did not trouble him much. He had given his name at the hotel as plain "Mr Smith," and as his cards had "The Reverend" on them it was not likely he would want any before he returned to Market Shapborough.

He took another look at the bank-note.

"I'll keep it," he soliloquised, "in case I ever meet the man again. Then I can give it back to the rascal with a piece of my mind."

CHAPTER IV

"OH, you *must* come and be a 'Cheshire Cat' this afternoon!"

It was a little before lunch, and everybody was assembling in the hall. Tobogganists came in, padded at elbow, pulling off enormous gloves, unlacing their long white snow gaiters, and clattering about in their heavy boots with the bristly steel "rakes" on toes; women with short skirts and skates on arm, stamping the snow clods off their feet as they entered. A gay, healthy-looking, smiling set of folk.

Eleanor Taylor, the girl who had sat next to John Smith on the previous evening, had broken away suddenly from a little group where an animated conversation had been going on. She came to where John Smith was standing, in the full glory of the check suit, knickers and all.

"You see one of our crew went over Shuttlecock this morning and sprained his ankle," she went on, "and we must have some one to take his place. The 'Cheshire Cats' hold the record so far."

"My dear young lady," said the astonished John Smith, "I am utterly at a loss. What——"

"Oh, I forgot," she replied. "Of course it's all new to you. I'll explain. The 'Cheshire Cats' are a bob-crew—every bob has a name, don't you know? There are five to a bob. And——"

"You'll excuse me, but what *is* a bob?"

She laughed.

"A sleigh—bob-sleigh, you know. Called so because we bob when we go down. Mr Pembury, as I told you, unfortunately went over Shuttlecock, and——"

"Over Shuttlecock?"

"Yes—one of the banks on the toboggan run—weren't you watching them this morning? We call them 'Battledore and Shuttlecock,' and 'Scylla and Charybdis,' you see. So we're one short, and you must come. You will, won't you? There's no one else I can think of."

"You want me to go on—on a 'bob,' I think you called it?"

"That's it. There's a race this afternoon, and——"

"But I really couldn't. I know nothing about it—I——"

"Oh, don't you worry about that. All you have to do is to sit tight and 'bob' when you're told. The brakesman says 'One, two—*bob!*' See? And when he says 'Lean!' then you lean."

"But I never——"

"It's just perfectly ripping. You go down the Cresta road at terrific speed. You'll like it awfully."

He expostulated: she persevered. He tried to argue: she cajoled him. Finally her enthusiasm half prevailed, exciting his inherent instinct for adventure. He said: "Well—er—if you *really* can't get any one else—I might—I—no, I don't think I——"

"Yes, you will. Oh, Mr Pembury," she cried, turning to a youth who was limping across towards them, "I've persuaded Mr——?"

"Smith!"

"Thank you. I've been talking to Mr Smith, and he wants to take your place this afternoon."

"I never said I *wanted* to," ejaculated John Smith grimly.

"Oh, thanks awfully," replied Pembury. "I came a mucker this morning. You'd better wear my sweater, hadn't he, Miss Taylor?"

"Rather!" she exclaimed. "Let's be in full rig, by all means."

John Smith began to wonder what he was in for now, especially when Pembury said he would come to his room after lunch and "bring him the togs."

Nevertheless he enjoyed his lunch. The crisp morning air had given him an appetite, and he had been much interested in watching the tobogganing down the Cresta Run. Eleanor Taylor was full of

animation, and talked to him in her perfectly natural manner. He began to feel a little trepidation after the meal, when Pembury came up and said he was ready to "rig him out."

A little while later he returned into the hall, looking anything but an ecclesiastical dignitary. Even the check suit was nothing to it. A pair of white flannel snow gaiters reached from ankle to hip, while his body was enveloped in a white sweater, emblazoned upon the front of which was an enormous "Cheshire Cat," grinning the proverbial grin, and in glaring red.

He saw the eyes of the sandy-haired clergyman fixed upon him from over his paper, somewhat reprovingly, he thought, and he returned his look with a stare of defiance. Somehow or other it was the crabbed face of that fellow-ecclesiastic of his that encouraged him most.

Eleanor Taylor was wearing a sweater with a similar device, while another girl and a couple of men were clad in the same uniform; together the five sauntered out of the hotel. Other "bob-crews" were congregating thickly, with "swans," "beetles," "stars," and other curious badges on sweaters and caps.

Presently John Smith stood among the group at the steep start of the run, watching, with some nervousness, crew after crew as they seated themselves astride the long, low, narrow "bobs," and shot,

down the run, snicking the electric contact-breaker at the top. The cries of "One—two—*bob!*" from the brakeman at the rear gradually grew fainter and fainter as the long course was rushed down, and then the starter, with his ear to the telephone from the bottom, suddenly yelled out the time of the run as signalled from the other end.

"Now, then, 'Cheshire Cats,' hurry up!"

Miss Taylor seated herself in front, and grasped the ropes that pulled the short pair of iron runners forming the steering gear. John Smith was in the middle, feeling a bit uncomfortable, and a strident-voiced youth brought up the rear, the handles of the toothed brake in his grasp.

"Off!"

John Smith held his breath as they shot swiftly down the sharp, snowed-up and iced incline forming the start.

"One—two—*bob!*" yelled the youth at the rear.

He forgot to "bob" forward sharply the first time, and the girl behind him struck him in the back with her head as she obeyed orders.

"Look out, number three! Now, then—One—two—*bob!*"

He bobbed with a will now. It was getting exciting this mad rush down through the pines.

"One—two—*bob!*"

It wanted doing, that bobbing. It took his breath away but he stuck to it manfully.

"Ach-tung! Ach-tung!"

The long-drawn-out German cry of warning preceded them, caught up by the watchers as the "bob" appeared in sight.

"Ach-tung!" shrieked Eleanor Taylor, as they approached a banked-up curve. The course must be kept clear, at all risks.

"Look out!" cried the brakesman as they took the corner. "*Lean!*"

John Smith nearly lost his balance as he threw himself over to the right. But the "bob" took it beautifully, and came round to the straight again with an exquisite bit of steering on the part of Miss Taylor.

"Bravo, Cats!" cried the bystanders, while John Smith heard one fellow shout:

"By George, number three's giving 'em weight!"

"One—two—*bob!*" The youth yelled louder and louder.

"Ach-tung! Ach-tung!!"

The famous "horse-shoe" corner, a curve of the sharpest.

"Brake!" cried the steers-woman, as they rushed up and round the great curving snow-bank.

"*Lean!*" shrieked the brakesman.

A slowing down, a mighty leaning to the left, a blurred vision of a crowd of eager spectators.

"Oh, well steered, Cats! Well done, Cats!"

"Now, then—One—two—*bob!*"

Pretty easy work now to the end of the run, where the electric contact-breaker was snicked and the crew jumped off, waiting to hear their "time."

At length all the "bobs" arrived at the foot of the run, and the jingle of bells was heard coming down, as a long row of horse-sleighs descended to drag up the heavy "bobs," their crews, meanwhile, walking to the top again. The race consisted of three runs, and John Smith was actually looking forward to the next. He was red in the face with his frantic "bobbing," and he puffed at his breath as he toiled up once more. He was quite excited, talking gaily with the rest of the crew, good-naturedly taking hints as to the art of the sport. He could hardly realise that he was really the Reverend John Smith, Canon-elect of Frattenbury Cathedral. His mind had gone back to his old College days—to the football field and the river, to that memorable quarter-mile handicap, and the cup which rested somewhere on a shelf in his Vicarage. It was with an almost boyish delight that he took his place once more on the "bob" and the madly-exhilarating rush through the air began. It was with the most intense eagerness that he heard the verdict:

"Three, eighteen, two."

Three minutes, eighteen seconds, and two-fifths! Hurrah! They stood well to win the handicap on the third run. It reminded him of bumping. His boat had been head of the river at Oxford when

he was bow. What a lot he had forgotten since, to be sure! On his way up he met his travelling companion of the previous day.

"You're taking kindly to it," said the youth, with a smile. "Prime sport, isn't it?"

"Rather!" exclaimed John Smith in a glow of excitement, and passed on; whereupon the youth said to a friend:

"I came over the Pass with that Johnny yesterday. Not a bad sort, but a bit stiff. Getting it taken out of him pretty soon, though."

The third course had commenced. The "Cheshire Cats" took the first corner very prettily, and then rushed down the straight for the "horse-shoe."

"Ach-tung!" "Brake!" "Lean!—look out!"

Just a failure to pull the steering-cord at the right moment, a little too high up the bank—and then——

The next moment John Smith was floundering on his back in the snow with another of the crew on the top of him, while the "bob" had turned half over.

A roar of laughter; the eager pointing and snapping of cameras by those who possessed them, and cries of—

"Oh, hard lines!" "Never mind, Cats!" "Lost it this time!"

John Smith picked himself up from his undignified position, catching Miss Taylor's face as he did so, and returning her smile with a laugh.

"I'm very sorry," he exclaimed; "I hope it wasn't my fault?"

"Not a bit," she replied, brushing the snow off her skirt; "I ought to have steered better. Never mind, better luck next time."

Pembury greeted them at the hotel when they returned, eager to hear how they had fared. Eleanor Taylor asked all the "crew" to tea in a cosy corner of the hall, and a very lively half-hour followed.

"How did you get on?" asked Pembury of John Smith.

"Capitally," answered Miss Taylor for him. "Didn't he?" she enquired of the brakesman.

"First-rate," said that youth; "tumbled to it at once."

"Tumbled *off* it, too," said Eleanor, "but that was my fault. Now, wasn't I right in saying it was ripping sport?" she went on, with an arch look at John Smith.

"I enjoyed it immensely," he said, and forthwith began to speak enthusiastically on the sport. They were a very merry party at that particular little table, and John Smith presently noticed that the stern-looking cleric, who was sitting alone, close by, over his tea, was regarding their merriment with his peculiar cold, grey eyes, and that the semblance of a superior sneer was playing round his mouth.

For the life of him he could not understand it, but he began to take a strong aversion to this man. As

he went to his room to dress for dinner he reasoned with himself that under any other circumstances this would have been the very man with whom he would have consorted. They would have discussed the latest ecclesiastical appointments, have deplored the signs of the spiritual decadence of the age, have mourned over the covert attacks contained in the last book of some scientific *savant*—oh yes, he knew well the kind of subjects that would have been the groundwork of their conversation.

But, as it was, he felt instinctively that the man was regarding him, as Eleanor Taylor had put it, "a soul to be saved." He resented it. He smiled as he thought what might have been the effect if he had been able to put on a clerical collar and announce himself to the stranger as "the Canon-elect of Frattenbury," and he rather rejoiced in his present position.

"Perhaps I'm learning something after all," he admitted, "and I'm certainly doing no harm—and—and—well, I *did* enjoy 'bobbing'—I can't deny it."

The cleric aforesaid annoyed him still further that evening. He came into the smoking-room where a group of men were lounging, and accosted John Smith in somewhat of a patronising tone, and with a decided mannerism of rebuke.

"Ah," he said, "I see you have fallen a victim to the sporting proclivities of the place."

"Well, yes," replied Smith, with unusual shortness, "I suppose I have. It's rather natural."

"I sometimes think," went on the other, "that there is a little too much of it here. It is sad—at least to me—to see people thinking of nothing else—giving up all their time to amusement; don't you think so?"

Forty-eight hours sooner John Smith might have agreed. But now such a question rubbed him the wrong way.

"After all," he replied, "it's a very innocent form of amusement. What harm is there in it?"

"Oh, I meant nothing personal," exclaimed the stranger, apparently noticing the effect of his question, "only so many never seem to take life seriously. You, of course, are older, and——"

"Yes," interrupted John Smith, who was sometimes noted for severity of speech in his parish, and who was growing really angry, "I am old enough to know that there is not very much harm in indulging in a little recreation after some months of fairly active work in—in—business." And he turned on his heel. The other man left the smoking-room the next moment.

"Devilish cheek, sir!" said a man, standing near, who had overheard it; "I wonder you stood it so well. I should have felt inclined to have punched his head—but, after all, he's only a parson, and knows no better. Jolly good thing they're not all like that."

Then the conversation became general. John Smith was a listener, more than a talker. He enjoyed hearing this free, untrammelled speech, and he was honestly trying to make the most of it and learn. Now and then something jarred upon him, but he never winced—even when he heard ecclesiastical matters touched on once, in a way that he had certainly never done before.

There was one remark, uttered casually by an apparently thoughtless youth, that rang through his mind as he retired for the night:

“If only parsons would be a bit more social, and try and help the people in social things, what a jolly lot more influence they'd have!”

CHAPTER V

JOHN SMITH had broken loose from the trammels of ecclesiastical conventionality with a vengeance. For several days he had been at St Moritz, thoroughly enjoying himself in spite of little whispered exhortations addressed by a conscience still robed in cassock and collar. He even clothed himself in the terrible check suit with quiet nonchalance, or fared forth as a "Cheshire Cat" quite at his ease, while he consumed his cigar in the smoking-room with a natural air, and could look towards the "Sandy Saint" with a stony indifference. "Bobbing" was becoming a delight to him, and he had also procured a pair of skates, and cautiously circled round the ice-rink on the inside edge a whole morning.

Three or four days had wrought a marvellous change in the man, albeit he held uncomfortable converse at times with the aforementioned conscience, especially when he remembered his newly-acquired dignity and bethought him of the verger awaiting him at Frattenbury with a silver poker.

But his sense of humour and adventure bore him

through, and he was honest enough to acknowledge to himself that he was really learning a lesson in humanity. Already he had made several mental resolutions. He thought of some of the men of his own parish at home, whom he had never known socially, and whom he had treated rather coldly as "not good churchmen." He determined to adopt a different attitude towards them. He remembered sundry disputes that had arisen at home, and began to understand that perhaps the layman's side of questions was worth looking into, and that he, as Vicar, was not invariably infallible by virtue of divine right—especially when there had been room for divine toleration.

In short, John Smith was fast making up for the years of ecclesiastical environment, and was gaining something of that inner knowledge of his fellow-beings which cannot be reached by the priest, but only by the man.

Eleanor Taylor was interested in him, delighting to draw him out, not only from the spirit of mischief which was natural to her, but because she felt he was really worth it as a character study. And he thoroughly enjoyed her frank, unconventional attitude, looking forward to lunch and dinner with a sense of satisfying something more than the appetite occasioned by the crisp mountain air.

They were at the dinner-table on the fourth evening after his arrival.

"Well, yes," he was saying, "I confess I have enjoyed my stay better than I thought I should."

"The first evening you were here you spoke of departing on the next day."

"So I did! And now I wish I could stay longer. But I shall have to be off early next week."

"You are going back to England—to work?"

There was just a shade of curiosity in her voice.

"Yes," he answered, rather hurriedly, "my holiday draws to an end. And you—when do you return?"

"Not before the end of March—and then for the daily round and common tasks of conventional life once more. It will be dull after St Moritz."

"You live in a quiet neighbourhood?"

"I told you the other night I'd been brought up in the atmosphere of eternal unchange and conservatism. Yes, we are overburdened at home with stolid fossils and the odour of respectable sanctity—we live under the veil of respectability."

"I suppose," he hazarded, "it is your somewhat advanced views that make you chafe under it?"

"Perhaps. I told you I shocked my father. He is Mayor of our city for this year, and that makes him worse than ever. Even *I* dare hardly chaff him now."

"Do you disagree with him in his municipal policy?" asked John Smith, with a laugh.

"Of course I do," she replied. "Our municipal policy is to keep everything back and to ignore all

improvements or Social Reform. It's partly the fault of the clergy."

"The clergy?"

"Yes. We are a Cathedral Town, you know," she said, turning her eyes full on him.

John Smith started inwardly. For the life of him he dared make no remarks on the subject. The vision of the silver poker glared before his mind, and he poured out a glass of wine silently.

"Perhaps you don't know what that means?" she went on unconsciously. "It means the deadening influence of the Close and its narrow-visioned clique. It pervades the whole place—it stops all effort—it pours the lukewarm water of respectability on all poor little fires of progress or enthusiasm, and, you know, lukewarm water extinguishes a fire as surely as cold water. I know what I should like to do."

"What?" he asked uncomfortably.

"Oh, it's sacrilegious, I suppose—why, set up an image of that mysterious entity called 'The Thing,' and a group of the Dean and Chapter, the holy spinsters and the town magnates bowing down before it."

He crumbled his bread uneasily.

"You seem to have a very poor opinion of your ecclesiastical dignitaries," he said.

"I have, indeed. And so would you if you had to live among them and put up with their nonsense."

"As, for instance——?"

"Oh, I could give you many instances. For example—ah! here are the letters!"

A waiter entered at that moment with a tray laden with letters. The post had been late that evening, owing to a fall of snow the other side of the Julier Pass, so the conversation was abruptly broken off.

There was nothing for John Smith among the budget. His Zürich address was the last he had left in England, and, on his arrival at St Moritz in his perturbed state of mind, he had written to Zürich and ordered all letters to be sent back to his Vicarage at home.

So he sat, eating his *compote* silently, but with a sinister feeling of some overhanging catastrophe taking possession of him. The conversation about the Cathedral City and the ecclesiastical dignitaries had strangely unmanned him. His conscience, having put on a bigger collar than ever, was shouting at his very soul with a speaking-trumpet. The verger with the silver poker had assumed a terrific aspect.

Suddenly he gave a start, and turned as pale as the table-cloth before him. Eleanor Taylor was reading extracts from her letters to her elderly companion.

"I've heard from father. He says the vacant canonry at Frattenbury has been filled up—another fossil, apparently. I'll read it."

And John Smith, stiff and motionless, found himself condemned to listen to the following :—

“Our vacant canonry has been offered to Mr Smith, the Vicar of Market Shapborough. I hear he is an excellent man for the post, extremely orthodox, of a good family—in spite of his name—and not at all likely to upset any of our Cathedral traditions, or to fall foul of the rest of the Chapter. The Dean, I am told, is delighted with the appointment. You know how keenly he values the harmony which prevails in the Close, and which will remain undisturbed. Mr Smith will, I believe, come into residence in April.”

The blood almost froze in John Smith's veins. He gulped down a glass of wine, and stole a quick glance at his companion. She was too much engrossed in her correspondence to notice him. A slight feeling of relief came into his mind. If she had had any suspicions he would have seen it. He was never more devoutly thankful for his ancestral name than at that moment.

He sat on, in dire reverie, in agonised suspense. The situation was critical, and he had not the courage either to brave it or to declare himself. He felt that if she took up the conversation where it had dropped he would betray his secret. And then—what *could* he do? He could never face the consequences in Frattenbury, and he was ashamed to throw himself upon her mercy and crave her silence.

From which it will be noted that conscience was at its favourite little game, to wit, holding a magnifying-glass over a blunder—turning a tiny drop of innocent water into a globe with horrid monsters in it.

But she did not take up the conversation. She went on reading her letters, and chatting about them to her companion, till the ladies began to move. Then she rose, and, with a little bow to John Smith, passed out of the room.

He sat, wrapt in gloom. Then his eye caught sight of an envelope she had left on the table—empty. He reached for it, and read the fatal word "Frattenbury" on the postmark. He groaned aloud.

Then a resolution, the resolution of a coward, took possession of him. Rising from the table he went straight to the hotel office, where the secretary was busily making up the accounts of the evening.

"What time does the *diligence* leave in the morning?" he asked, in the tone of voice a haunted criminal, escaping from justice, might be expected to assume.

"Where does Monsieur wish to go to?" enquired the polite functionary.

"Oh, anywhere — that is, I wish to return to England; I am leaving to-morrow."

"There is a *diligence* for the Maloja at eight in the morning, if Monsieur wishes to travel by that route—or perhaps he would like to go *via* Thusis."

"Not Thusis—certainly not Thusis," replied the Canon-elect, with a lively recollection of that place; "the Maloja will do."

"It is a fine drive," remarked the secretary; "but perhaps the hour is too early for Monsieur. An extra post might be better?"

"Can I have an extra post at any hour?" asked John Smith anxiously. He remembered that Eleanor Taylor had mentioned she was coming down to breakfast early.

"But certainly, Monsieur!"

"Then order it for seven o'clock—and let me have my bill to-night—in my room—send it up—do you understand?"

"It shall be done, Monsieur," replied the imperturbable secretary, making a note of it, with a slight shrug of his shoulders to express his innermost view of the eccentricity of the Englishman in general.

And so it came to pass that at an early hour the following morning John Smith was gliding down the glorious Maloja Pass in a solitary sleigh. But little heed did he take of the scenery, nor did he stop, when once he had commenced that homeward journey, more than he could help, until he arrived at his Vicarage, well muffled up in his great-coat. Then did he clothe himself in ecclesiastical garb once more and lock up the garments that had been foisted upon him at Thusis—putting them out of sight with a grim smile of satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI

ST ROGER'S GATE, Frattenbury, is the entrance from the quiet and staid South Street into the still more quiet and staid precincts of the Close. You pass through the solid stone archway into an atmosphere of unbroken rest and repose. Straight on, at the further end of the narrow street, is the entrance to the Bishop's palace; on your left, standing in fair gardens, are the mansions in which the Dean, the Archdeacon, and the Canons in Residence live in a majestic calm; on your right, there comes first St Roger's Walk, with its creeper-covered houses, leading to the cloisters, a quaint, paved pathway—presumably the favourite strolling-ground of the aforesaid Saint, who was Bishop of Frattenbury in the fourteenth century.

Leaving his retreat on your right you pass on, by sundry small houses, until another paved pathway leads you to a different part of the cloisters. Here you may see the Dean, or one of the Canons, proceeding in state from his house to the Cathedral, his verger with the silver wand gravely walking before him.

The various houses in the Close are by no means entirely occupied by the Cathedral clergy, though some of the smaller ones in St Roger's Walk are the houses of the Minor Canons—small fry who do most of the work in the services, but are not allowed to preach excepting at rare intervals—small fry who are useful in handing round tea at the Dean's afternoon functions, and who are in other ways equally necessary to Cathedral traditions.

The other houses are chiefly occupied by widows and spinsters. Not ordinary widows or spinsters, mind you—not the widows of worldly mind who, to quote the Apostle, “wax wanton,” or the spinsters who degrade themselves with golf or bicycles and other pomps and vanities of the world, but widows and spinsters who are in every way fit and eligible for the sphere of the Close, who can say, “my husband, the late Canon,” or “poor dear father, we were only reading one of his beautiful sermons last night—a volume of them was printed after he died,”—widows and spinsters who have missionary boxes conspicuously displayed on the hall table, who attend the daily services with unflinching regularity, who are never absent from the Bible Class of the “*dear Dean*,” and who are, in fact, inseparable from the life (or shall we say, existence?) of the Close of a Cathedral City.

Such were the three Miss Millingtons, spinsters of uncertain age and certain income, living in one

of the houses almost opposite to that occupied by the Canon in Residence.

On the particular afternoon in April in which this chapter opens, the three ladies in question were seated in their prim drawing-room in great complaisance. Set out on the table was the best china tea-service with the pale blue pattern and gold edging. A stand contained various trays of minute pieces of bread and butter, tiny squares of cake, and that strange assortment of sweetmeats so indispensable to the English afternoon function, and yet so sparingly partaken of.

Rose Millington, the eldest of the trio, sat by the tea-table, surveying the arrangements with quiet satisfaction. Her sister Bella, the second of the three, was seated at a small davenport, writing a letter, while Daisy, the youngest, was putting the finishing touch to some vases of flowers.

"There!" she exclaimed. "Now, everything looks very nice, doesn't it?"

"*Quite* nice, dear," replied her sister, "except, perhaps, that vase is a *little* too near the edge. Yes, *that's* better! Whatever makes Janey so late?"

There being no answer to this question, Miss Millington went on in an undertone.

"She has no idea of time, has Janey."

It was characteristic of the eldest Miss Millington to ask questions at the end of sentences and to reply to them herself, under her breath.

"What's Lady Cunningham's address?" asked Bella sharply, as she poised her pen over an undirected envelope.

"Stone Court," replied Daisy.

"No, dear," corrected Miss Millington, "Stone Grange. What are you writing to her about?"

"Daisy's right, it's Stone *Court*," snapped Bella.

"I suppose it's about William Bubb, he——" began Miss Millington, *sotto voce*. Then, aloud: "Daisy is *wrong*, Bella."

"Can't help it, I've written it now," said Bella while Daisy, from long experience, kept silence.

"Yes," went on Bella, "it's about William Bubb. He's gone there as footman, and it's a pity he should drop out of St Roger's Guild. I hope she'll let him come."

The "Guild of St Roger for Men-servants" was the pet hobby of the two elder Miss Millingtons, as many who kept those commodities in Frattenbury realised—to their secret annoyance. But then the Dean was the President!

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Millington; "it would be a pity to lose him. By the way, I wonder whether Canon Smith will help us with the Guild? I expect the Dean has told him about it. And——"

At this moment the door opened and a girl of about two- or three-and-twenty, wearing a short cycling skirt, came into the room.

"No one come yet, I suppose, aunties mine?" she said quietly, pulling off her gloves.

"My *dear* Jane," ejaculated Miss Millington, "we were wondering what had become of you. I *wish* you would remember the time better. *How* can you change your dress in all this hurry?"

Jane looked carefully at the clock.

"It wants five minutes to the half-hour—there is plenty of time," she replied.

"There is *not* plenty of time!" snapped Bella, "You should have a little more thought, dear. You owe it to us—and to our guests as well."

"You shouldn't ride so far, Janey," murmured Daisy, intent upon getting in an appropriate remark.

In reply, Jane Rutland kissed all three aunts, commencing with the eldest, took off her hat, and said:

"Perhaps I'd better not change at all, if there isn't time."

This evolved three little shrieks of consternation.

"Go and take off that dreadful skirt at once, Janey, before any one comes," said Bella.

"Well, if you'd *really* rather I did——" said Janey, rising and going towards the door, much to the relief of the three spinsters.

"Dear, dear! *when* will Janey learn ordinary proprieties?" asked Miss Millington, adding, in her undertone: "She never will—she never will. She's hopeless."

"Horrid bicycles!" muttered Bella. Then a ring and a knock came at the door, and the three

sisters stiffened themselves yet more to receive guests.

An eminently respectable man-servant opened the door, and announced in a good clerical monotone—caught from Cathedral association :

“Mrs Sylvester.”

Mrs Sylvester, a widow with an eternal smile, affectionately enquired after the sisters’ healths, rejoicing to know that the cold winds of early spring had not materially affected them.

“And have you made the acquaintance of the new Canon yet?” asked Mrs Sylvester presently.

“Yes, we have,” replied Miss Millington. “We met him at the Dean’s on Tuesday. Do you know him?”

“Only by sight.”

“He’s coming here to-day,” said Bella.

“Indeed!” said Mrs Sylvester sweetly. “And what do you think of him?”

“He seems an exceedingly nice man,” ventured Daisy.

“Daisy, dear!” exclaimed Miss Millington in a tone of mild rebuke, “we’ve only seen him *once*. We *hope* he’s nice.”

Mrs Sylvester smiled with increased sweetness.

“He must find the house very large,” she remarked “Canon Gregory often said there was too much room, and *he* had a wife and family. Has he any relatives living with him?”

"No," said Bella, "none that we've heard of."

"Quite alone!" exclaimed Mrs Sylvester, raising her eyebrows sympathetically.

One or two more guests were now shown in, and the conversation became general. Jane, having completed her toilette, came in, and then the solemn man-servant announced:

"The Reverend Canon Smith."

He was faultlessly attired in clerical garb. A slight change had taken place since he left St Moritz. He had shaved off his little mutton-chop whiskers. It was an event that had been brought about by just a touch of cowardice of which he was half ashamed. He had thought that perhaps it might alter him just a *little*, in case he ever came across any of the witnesses of the check suit escapade.

Miss Millington rose to receive him affably. Tea was served, and the butler allotted the services of a Minor Canon to assist in the distribution thereof.

Very soon Canon Smith was being initiated into the mysterious workings of the "Guild of St Roger."

"Yes," said Miss Millington, "we started it about two years ago. Of course the Dean helped us, he's *so* good. We could never have done it by ourselves. We *do* hope you'll be interested in it. Canon Gregory was very kind. He addressed our last meeting. Don't you think it's an excellent work?—Of course you do."

"Oh, very excellent, I have no doubt."

"You see, men-servants are a class apart. They can't associate with tradesmen or others. And *nothing* is ever done for them."

"Too much left to themselves," put in Bella, who was getting bored with the Minor Canon's wife. "There are guilds for all sorts of other people, and so we said, why not get the men-servants of the place together? *Something* ought to be done for them."

"How very true!" said the Minor Canon's wife.

"It has not been easy work," said Miss Millington. "So many of the people are thoughtless, and it is difficult to get them to take an interest in the spiritual welfare of those they employ. Isn't it sad to meet with indifference?"

"But you have succeeded splendidly," remarked the Minor Canon's wife.

"Sad — sad — oh, *most* sad!" murmured Miss Millington in answer to her own enquiry, while Bella said:

"Yes—we have succeeded. We have a nucleus."

"And where do you hold your meetings?" asked the Canon.

"In our drawing-room," replied Miss Millington—"once a month. It is sometimes a little awkward, of course, but we feel it is a good work. Let me give you another cup of tea, Mrs Sylvester."

"I always say they would be much more at home in the kitchen—with the maids," said a quiet voice at the Canon's elbow; "don't you think so?"

He turned, to find himself confronted by Jane, who was slowly stirring her tea and looking at him with her deep grey eyes.

An involuntary smile played round his lips for a moment. She was quick to observe it.

"Perhaps they *would* be more in their element," he admitted.

"You mustn't tell my aunts that—but I'm glad you agree with me. I'm sorry for the poor men."

"But I understand they *come*," he said.

"Because they're sent. I hope you'll remember that if you address them, and not be hard on them."

She handed him her cup to pass. Her aunts had not heard this scrap of conversation in the general buzz. At that moment the door was opened, and a late guest shown in.

"Miss Taylor!"

Canon Smith put down the cup on the table and moved slightly into the background. The moment that had been haunting him for weeks past had come, and come suddenly and unexpectedly. He knew that, sooner or later, he would be sure to meet Miss Taylor. He did not know whether she would recognise him when the meeting took place. Over and over again, in his calmer moments, had he blamed himself for his precipitous flight from St Moritz, acknowledging that the wisest course would have been to frankly admit his personality. After all, he had not been guilty of a crime, and he was not the first clergyman who

had arrayed himself in "mufti" for a holiday. And—all said and done—he had not only enjoyed the experience, but he had learned much.

Of course he saw that his sudden flight had only made it the harder for him. If Miss Taylor recognised in the Canon in Residence the enthusiastic "Cheshire Cat," and chose to tell the story of his running away at the possibility of discovery, things would not go very smoothly with him at Frattenbury.

So he had carefully weighed the situation, and had come to a conclusion that was not so wise as it might have been, to wit, that "honesty is the best policy, provided it is *necessary* to be honest"—a strangely roundabout way of putting things, but a way that we often have with us.

In his case the "necessity" was based on the chance of a recognition on the part of Eleanor Taylor. If she did *not* recognise him, he argued, weakly enough perhaps, that it was not worth while to refer to the subject at all—which, of course, shows that he secretly hoped she would not recognise him.

She shook hands with the Miss Millingtons, bowed to one or two friends, and took her seat in a part of the room at a little distance from John Smith, where she was waited on by the Minor Canon, who in his turn was rather sharply watched by his wife. For Eleanor Taylor was not exactly of the "Close set." Also, she was attractive.

All persons possessing the latter qualification and

lacking the first were in danger of the judgment—of the Close.

And the judgment of the Close was sweetly tempered with orthodoxy and hell fire.

She fingered a tiny square of cake, answered the uninteresting remarks of the Minor Canon, and then, her eyes wandering round the room, fell on the profile of John Smith.

She knitted her brows slightly with a puzzled air. A wave of recollection swept over her. She looked at him steadily. A little trick, a gesture of his arm, completed the recognition.

Instantly she turned her face towards the Minor Canon. He had just made some inane remark intended to be smart, and he thought the sparkle in her eyes and the smile that twitched her lips was the reward of his wit.

The Minor Canon's wife noted the smile too, and ralled to her spouse to put her cup down for her.

Five minutes later, and Eleanor Taylor was formally introduced to the Canon in Residence. Before this he had caught her eye, and taken courage from its utter blankness of expression.

She looked him straight in the face without the quiver of a muscle, and his heart sang jubilate. He little knew that she was only putting him to the test.

"And how do you like Frattenbury?"

"Very much, thanks."

"Of course you knew it before?"

"Only slightly. My parish is quite on the outskirts of the diocese."

"It is a delightful time to come; we are famous for our gardens in Frattenbury, and they will soon be looking beautiful."

"I suppose so."

"I have been looking forward to the spring so much. I have been spending the winter abroad, and one always longs for home in that case."

"Yes."

The ordinary remark would have been to ask her where she had spent the winter. The monosyllable was all he dared to venture.

But she never, by the slightest sign, betrayed how much she knew and her amusement at his discomfiture—for such it was.

Later on, when she was alone, she laughed softly to herself over the situation, soliloquising:

"Poor Canon Smith! How very relieved he was when he thought I hadn't recognised him! So *that* is why he ran away. He must have heard me reading that extract about him from father's letter. It's too funny! I wish he'd have been a little more honest about it, but I suppose he's fearfully afraid of the story leaking out among those Close fogies! I sympathise with him most heartily.

"Oh, if they could have seen him bobbing! *What* a scandal for a Cathedral dignitary! I can imagine

those Millington women discussing it. *And* his check suit! He's not really a bad sort — and — well, he showed to more advantage at St Moritz than here. At any rate, *I* shall not give him away."

When the Canon in Residence left the Miss Millingtons it was with a feeling of the profoundest joy. She had not recognised him! He took his hat and stick from the sombre butler, absently tilted the former rather far back on his head, and as he walked through the Close to his Residence he swung his stick round and round.

He was lost in satisfaction. A load was lifted from his mind. He stepped out buoyantly, and even fell to humming a tune.

And at the corner he passed within a couple of yards of the Dean without even seeing him.

That stately functionary stood quite still, lifted his folding glasses solemnly to his nose, and stared fixedly at John Smith as the latter passed on, humming, unconsciously, his gay tune louder than ever, and swinging his stick with increasing rapidity.

"Dear me!" said the Dean. "Dear me!"

He lowered his glasses, wiped them, turned, and passed on his way majestically.

And again he said, in a tone of Decanal wonder, "Dear me!"

CHAPTER VII

IF you had been coming from paying a call upon the Bishop, or one of his satellites, and had left the sacred precincts of the Close by St Roger's Gate, and had crossed the South Street outside, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, you would have found yourself at a small, old-fashioned shop, with the legend, "Thomas Rice, Licensed Dealer in Tobacco and Snuff," inscribed over the door.

Entering the said door you would have probably found the said Thomas Rice straight in front of you, in his favourite attitude, seated behind his counter, his elbows on the latter, and his chin resting in his hands, an old straw hat on his head, and a cigar, as often as not half smoked and gone out, sticking from under his bristling, grey moustache.

Understand, however, that if you had been an inhabitant of the Close—from the Bishop down to the junior Priest Vicar or Minor Canon—you would certainly have turned aside either to the right hand or to the left on emerging into the

South Street. By no means would you have entered the sanctum of the said Thomas Rice, not necessarily because you were a non-smoker, but because the individual in question was "Tabooed" by the Close.

We smile at the poor ignorant heathen of Central Africa and his superstition in avoiding all that has been declared to be "Fetish" under penalties of the savage Powers that be; yet, without questioning, the adherents of Christian Powers that were in Frattenbury accepted the equally mysterious verdict that such a person or such a thing was "Taboo."

They used to call it "Anathema" in St Paul's time, and down to the Reformation. The Reformation, however, abolished so nasty a *word* from practical usage.

But that was all the Reformation did in the matter.

The reason why Thomas Rice was placed outside the pale of respectability—which was the boundary limit of Cathedral Christianity—was twofold: he was a Freethinker and a Radical. It would be difficult to say which was the more terrible term of the two. If, on the one hand, he was an offender against Ecclesiastical Creeds, on the other he was an offender against Ecclesiastical Practices, as set forth by the clergy of the Close, who were, to a man, orthodox Conservatives.

Irony had decreed that his shop should be exactly

opposite St Roger's Gate, and he made the most of this decree of Irony. It delighted him to place in his window some glaring announcement of a "Speech on Disestablishment," or a lecture on "The Mistakes of the Bible," and he keenly enjoyed, from his vantage point, watching the face of the Dean when that dignitary's eye caught such a notice, as he solemnly came forth from the Close.

On the particular occasion upon which this chapter opens, such a placard hung in his window, on which were conspicuous the words—"Ratepayers' Association," "Sanitary Reform."

He had only just affixed this notice and had gone back to his position behind the counter. An individual who, to judge from a roll of similar placards in his hand, had brought him the announcement, was half seated on this counter, tranquilly enjoying a cigarette. He was a large-built man of about forty, with a fresh-coloured, clean-shaven face. It would have been difficult to say, at a glance, what he was. He might have passed for a farmer or horse-dealer, and yet there was just a touch of something aristocratic about him that seemed a little out of place with such avocations.

"Hullo," said the tobacconist, as he gazed through his glass door, "here comes the latest addition to the Rookery. What's he like? Same as the rest of 'em?"

The other followed his gaze and saw Canon Smith coming down the Close on the other side of St Roger's Gate.

"Don't know," he answered; "I don't dislike his face, somehow."

"Oh, humbug!" sneered Rice; "they're all touched with the same brush. Not a man among 'em. I say, though, *he* don't know his way about yet, eh?"

For Canon Smith had now passed through the gateway and was making straight for the tobacconist's shop.

"I believe he's coming in," said the man with the cigarette.

Rice swore beneath his breath.

"It'll be the first parson I've had in for five years," he said quickly, "and I'll bet you he don't come again. You see!"

He glared fiercely, much to the other's amusement, as Canon Smith opened the door. The latter was innocently intent upon his favourite brand.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly. "Quite a change in the weather."

"Yes—nasty draught now you've left the door open," snapped Rice.

A little bit annoyed, the Canon turned and closed the door, then he came up to the counter.

"Do you keep 'Southern Mixture'?"

"Yes," was the curt response from the tobacconist, who had not altered his position in the least.

"A quarter of a pound tin, please," demanded the Canon.

"It's up there. You can get it if you want it," ejaculated Rice, suddenly pointing to a shelf high up on the side of the shop, and winking, ever so slightly, at the other man.

The Canon saw the wink. For just a moment he was angry at the insult, and half turned to go. Then suddenly a recollection of the smoking-room at St Moritz swept over him—a scene when some one had been purposely rude to the "Sandy Saint" and had thereby succeeded in clearing the room of him. Intuitively he perceived that he was in a kindred atmosphere. Instantly he decided not to accept defeat, and then an inkling of a smile rose to his lips as a plan of action unfolded itself in his mind.

"Thanks," he said quietly. Then he took the one chair the shop possessed in front of the counter, mounted it, and reached down a tin of "Southern Mixture" from the shelf. Placing the tin in his pocket, and still standing on the chair, he asked: "How much?"

"One and eightpence."

The Canon took out his purse, deliberately counted the money, and, reaching up once more, placed it on the shelf.

"You can get it if you want it," he said, with a humorous twinkle in his eye as he got down from his perch. "Good morning!"

A grin slowly broke out on the face of the tobacconist, while the other man jumped to his feet with a hearty laugh.

"By George, that's one in the eye for you, Rice!" he exclaimed. "I believe he's a chap worth knowing."

He ran out of the shop, overtook the Canon, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Good morning!" he said. "You didn't recognise me in the shop, did you? Ha, ha!—you made old Rice sit up a bit!"

"I really haven't the pleasure——"

"Oh yes, you have. We met at the Dean's the other day—he's my uncle, you know."

"Ah, dear me, I suppose we did—yes—I remember you now."

As a matter of fact they had never been introduced, but they had both been in the same room at the Dean's.

"Our friend the tobacconist is a character—but I think he met his match this morning. Which way are you going?"

They had just reached a turn in the street, and Canon Smith seemed undecided.

"Well, to tell you the truth," he said, "I'm doing a little shopping this morning, and I'm not accustomed to the town yet. I'm on the look-out for a stationer—and a fishmonger. Perhaps you can help me, Mr——?"

"Horne—Everett Horne—same surname as the Dean's," replied the other, his lips twitching with an amused expression. "Yes—I think I can put you in the way of getting some excellent fish, at all events. I'll go with you."

"It's very kind of you. I hope I'm not taking you out of your way?"

"Quite the contrary," said Everett Horne drily.

Presently they stopped in front of a particularly well-appointed shop, and Horne motioned the Canon to enter.

"I will be with you again in a minute," he said, as he left his companion to choose his fish. The latter did not notice, for the moment, where Everett Horne went, but was engrossed in the conflicting choice between whiting and soles.

"Well, I hope you've found what you wanted?" exclaimed a voice at his elbow a minute later.

"Oh yes—thanks—Why——!"

The Canon uttered an exclamation of astonishment as he turned. Everett Horne stood beside him, in his shirt-sleeves, with a dark blue-and-white apron girded round his waist.

"I can guarantee the whiting," he said gravely; "they are some of the finest I have had this year."

"You—you—I don't quite understand!" exclaimed the Canon.

"I've had the pleasure of bringing you to my own shop, that's all—and securing a regular customer, I

hope—the only one in the Close. Somehow my uncle neither patronises nor recommends me. Sam, clean out those whiting, and send them round to the Canon in Residence.”

He looked keenly at the Canon. The latter took out his purse with a smile.

“Shall I pay you ready money?”

“Or would you prefer a book?”

“By all means.”

Then Everett Horne knew that he had passed the ordeal, and was satisfied.

“Now,” he said, “will you spare a few minutes and come behind the scenes? I’m in bachelor quarters.”

“Delighted,” said John Smith, as he followed his host through the shop, and upstairs into a charming room at the back of the house, overlooking one of the old gardens for which the city of Frattenbury is famous.

“You see,” he explained, as he lit his pipe, “I’m rather a Bohemian in my way, and it doesn’t altogether go down in Frattenbury with your ilk. But I tell Uncle it isn’t *my* fault he’s a Dean, and there ought to be a living for both of us.”

“How long have you been a—a——”

“Fishmonger? Oh, some years. I’ve knocked about and tried my hand at lots of things. Well, I’m very glad to secure you for a customer. And how do you think you’ll like your three months’ residence here?”

"Well," said the Canon slowly, "I hardly know. I've been here such a short time."

He was wondering whether this man had any object in trying to draw him out.

Everett Horne smoked his pipe silently for a few seconds. Then he drew it from his mouth and puffed out a cloud of smoke.

"It's a rum place, to my mind," he said.

"How so?"

"Oh, well, perhaps you'll find out, Canon Smith. Take any interest in that sort of thing?" he added carelessly, jerking his head towards a notice of the "Ratepayers' Association" that was pinned to the wall.

"I've heard it spoken of," replied the Canon evasively.

"By one of the Cathedral clergy?"

"Yes—the Archdeacon."

"Who scarcely lauded it, eh?"

"He said it was a pity."

"So it is—when you have two streets of wretched houses that are positively unsanitary, and can't get the landlords to take the matter up or the Town Council to make 'em."

"Who are the landlords?"

Everett Horne gave a puff or two, and then answered drily:

"Half the houses belong to the Mayor—the others are the property of—a certain corporate body."

"What corporate body?"

"The Dean and Chapter of Frattenbury!"

The Canon gave a little start. The mention of the Mayor recalled certain reminiscences, while the last statement was difficult to answer.

"Come and look at my crocuses," said Everett Horne, rising, and motioning the Canon to the window; "fine, aren't they?"

"Very fine. But I must really go now. Will you come and see me some evening?"

"Pleasure! Specially as you keep Southern Mixture."

The Canon gave a glance at the bill as he left the room.

"You're the Chairman of this Association, I see?"

"I am."

They went down into the shop together. Here the Canon hesitated.

"What did you say the name——"

"Grove Street and Palmer's Alley—second turning to the left, up North Street. Hope you'll like the fish. Good morning!"

He turned briskly to serve a customer, while Canon Smith slowly walked out of the shop. The latter, after making a few other purchases, took a roundabout way home to the Close. He sauntered up the North Street, and he presently followed a turning to the right. Here he soon found himself in a squalid, poverty-stricken slum, conspicuous in

the midst of which was a gaudy public-house with the legend, "Taylor's Noted Frattenbury Ales," inscribed in enormous letters on the face of it.

Sir Daniel Taylor was the Mayor. The Canon was reluctantly beginning to understand matters. Sundry conversations at St Moritz were recalled to his mind.

At the door of one of the dark little houses a slatternly, brazen-faced woman was standing, arms akimbo, breath smelling of morning beer. As the Canon came slowly along the street she eyed him suspiciously.

"Can you tell me if I can get round this way to the Cathedral?" he asked, stopping in front of her.

"Yes. Be you the Dean?"

Strange ignorance of a denizen of a Cathedral City!

"No."

"I thought yer might be. But 'e knows better than to come anigh us. They do say," she went on with semi-alcoholic garrulousness, "that 'e owns this 'ere street, but we never sees no one but an agent. 'E's got a big 'ouse and don't care 'ow the likes of us lives s' long's gits 'is rent, I reckon."

"Is there—is there anything the matter with these houses?" asked the Canon uncomfortably, feeling for all the world like a spy.

"Is there anything the matter!" sniffed the woman; "will yer walk inside?"

He followed—with reddening cheeks.

The woman led the way to the back scullery and pointed to the sink.

“Put yer nose to the spout while I pumps,” she exclaimed, “and yer’ll soon see if anything’s the matter.”

He declined to investigate quite so far. She pumped all the same. The result was obvious.

“But surely you have the water laid on?”

“One tap—out at the back—for twelve houses, and we can’t always be a-fetchin’ on it. But that’s the way they gits out of it. I’d like to get the Dean’s ’ead under this ’ere spout!”

As he emerged from the house, the first person he saw coming up the street was Eleanor Taylor. She must have observed where he had been.

“Good morning!” she said, as she met him. “Not a very nice neighbourhood, is it?”

“Not very,” he replied, “and it seems worse inside than out.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so,” she replied; “it’s quite time some one investigated matters.”

“Oh,” he said, “I just went into one of the houses—by accident.”

“Yes?” she said half enquiringly, “I daresay you have heard they are in a bad state. The ‘Powers that be’ in Frattenbury want stirring up about these things, you know. I often tell my father so.”

“Well,” replied the Canon reflectively, “perhaps

a way may be found of setting things to rights if they are really so bad. Good morning!"

She smiled softly to herself as she walked on. Palmer's Alley was familiar to her as a bone of contention, and she remembered having mentioned it to him at St Moritz. Her smile gave place to a groan as her eyes presently lit on "Taylor's Noted Frattenbury Ales."

And the Canon pursued his way home thoughtfully, not without once again congratulating the Fates that Eleanor Taylor had not recognised him.

It was a few days after this that the Dean was seated at lunch with his wife. They were at either end of a long table, monotonously set out with great exactitude as to the position of cutlery and spoons. Before the Dean was a large dish on which lay two exceedingly small cutlets. One of these he sent to his wife, the other he took himself. Minute portions of vegetables followed.

The Dean was a tall, lantern-cheeked man, with dark side-whiskers, scrupulously parallel. His legs were slender, and his scanty apron hung in perpendicular folds.

Folks liked being asked to meals at the Deanery—naturally. But they invariably came away hungry. The Archdeacon's butler always prepared a large plate of sandwiches and left them on the table anent the return of his master whenever the latter dined

with the Dean. For the Archdeacon's apron was strongly inclined to horizontal creases.

The Dean, having solemnly finished his cutlet, pinched up his lower lip with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, and tapped his folding glasses on the table gently with the other hand.

His wife understood the meaning of this. Something had ruffled the Decanal mind.

She was a short, pinched-looking woman, with a sharp face that was always poking itself forward, and a quick, grating voice. She rejoiced in the Christian name of Octavia.

"Ahem!" coughed the Dean.

"My dear?"

"I have been surprised this morning, Octavia—not to say annoyed."

"It's Everett again, I suppose. He ought to leave the town. His position here is preposterous. What has he been doing now?"

"It is not entirely Everett, my dear," replied the Dean, "though he is greatly to blame. He had one of his Ratepayers' Association meetings last night."

"They ought to be stopped. Why doesn't the Mayor order the police to prevent people going to them?" said the Dean's wife, with a fine sense of local veto.

"They discussed the sanitation of Palmer's Alley, I am told."

"Impertinence!"

"But that is not the point, Octavia. I have actually heard that Canon Smith was at the meeting."

Mrs Horne laid down her fork with a crash, and sent her head forward with a jerk.

"*What?*"

The Dean nodded appallingly. "I fear it is perfectly true!"

"You will speak to him about it?"

"If opportunity serves I shall—ahem!—not forget to mention it."

"You will tell the Bishop?"

"He ought not to be left ignorant of the doings of his clergy."

"Did he speak? Did he say anything? Was he on the platform? Who took him there? Did he go of his own accord? Did he know what he was doing?"

"My dear," said the Dean, "these, of course, are questions to which one will have to find answers. All I know at present is that he was *there!*"

Mrs Horne ruminated in horror.

"Pity he isn't a curate," she said, with a lively recollection of what would have happened in the Dean's late parish. "You haven't half the power you ought to have."

"My dear," said the Dean, with a majestic

effort of Christian charity, "let us not judge him hastily——"

"But he was *there!*"

"True, true," replied the Dean, sadly shaking his head, "he was there. It is certainly most extraordinary!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE meeting of the "Guild of St Roger for Men-servants" was over. There had been no less than nine of that fraternity present in the Miss Millingtons' drawing-room. First, there was their own solemn butler, then the respective butlers of the Dean, the Archdeacon, and Sir Daniel Taylor, the page-boy of the former, a sprinkling of other men-servants from the Close, and the individual rejoicing in the name of William Bubb, who had been sent in from Lady Cunningham, who lived just outside Frattenbury.

The said William Bubb, by reason of residing at a distance, had been graciously sent to the kitchen for "tea." Here he sat, his arm round the cook's waist—for it was in virtue of "keeping company" with this culinary domestic that he had joined the Guild, and not for his soul's sake—and a big jug of beer in front of him on the table. The Dean's page-boy had surreptitiously invited himself to tea, forasmuch as the aforesaid cook was his aunt and her cakes were excellent, cake being unknown in the Dean's household.

The solemn butler stood with his back to the fire, a glass of beer in hand, surveying the scene placidly.

"Well," said the cook, "I hope you've had a proper jawin'. You wants it, all of you."

"Prime!" said the page-boy, cramming a huge piece of cake into his mouth. "It's done me a lot o' good. I feels heaps better."

The solemn butler smiled majestically.

"You looks it, young cockalorum," he said. "It's relieved your conscience and given you an appetite for your food, eh?"

"I never has any trouble about the appetite," ejaculated the boy; "it's food I'm generally in want of."

There was a laugh at this, the state of the Deanery being pretty well known.

William Bubb slowly took his arm from the cook's waist, raised his glass to his lips, emptied it, poured himself out another, put his arm in its former position and said meditatively :

"He ain't a bad sort."

"Who ain't?" asked the cook.

"The parson who talked to us."

"Who was it?"

"Canon Smith," said the solemn butler.

"Lor! Why, I might have known that without asking."

"Why, my dear?" asked William Bubb.

"Ask the missusses why," replied the cook, giggling.

"He's a single man, is Canon Smith—go up and ask the missusses why they had him in and asked him to stay to tea. *They* knows, Lor bless you!"

William Bubb made no effort to carry out the cook's injunction. He merely whistled.

"You wimmen are all alike," he said, "always a-tryin' to entangle us"—which philosophical truism made the cook toss her head and mutter "Impudence!"

"You're quite right, William," said the solemn butler; "he's a cut above the rest of 'em. What I liked about him was that he spoke fair. I've never attended one of these humbugging meetings yet without being told about 'my station in life,' and jawed at about duty to my betters, or had total abstinence rammed down my throat, or been given a sermon on swearing. But he didn't take up any o' these lines; eh, William?"

"No," replied Bubb; "he spoke as if he was a man himself, and not a parson. There was a deal o' human nature in what he said, too."

"What d'yer call human nature?" asked the cook innocently.

"This, my dear," he responded, giving her a squeeze—"likewise this," he added, pouring out another glass of beer.

"Was that what he talked about?" asked the cook with a laugh.

"Not exactly. But he wasn't bad, as I said just now."

"The Dean don't like him," remarked the page-boy as well as he could, his mouth being full.

"How do you know, young 'un?" asked the solemn butler.

"I heard him tell the old woman he was upsettin' things at their Chapter meetings—somethin' about some houses or somethin'."

"Palmer's Alley," said the butler. "Time something was done to 'em, from what I've heard."

Just then the drawing-room bell rang, and the butler left the kitchen to answer it. He returned in a minute or two with a plate in his hand.

"More bread and butter, cook. It's a very pretty sight upstairs."

"What's up?" asked cook.

"They're all a-sitting round him—hemming him in, so to speak. Miss Millington's a-loading him up with tea, Miss Bella's a-talking about *you*, William—I heard her say you was a worthy young man—and Miss Daisy's a-looking at him with languishing eyes and a-tryin' to get in a word about her 'Mission to the Cinder-Sifters' up in London—and, I tell you, he looks deuced uncomfortable."

"Is Miss Jane there?"

"She's sitting in a corner of the room a-laughing up her sleeve at the lot of 'em."

"Well," said William Bubb, "there's safety in numbers."

"And there's another thing," ejaculated cook, as

she went on cutting the bread and butter, "not one on 'em 'ull ever get hold of him alone."

"Same as you did me!" put in Bubb.

"Go along with you! No, they ain't built that way—else they'd never have been old maids."

"You put too much confidence in your sex, cook," replied the butler sententiously. "*I'd* never have fallen a victim to their individual charms, *I* know."

"I think he ought to have his mother along with him to shapperoon him," remarked William Bubb; "'tisen't quite proper."

Upstairs, the subject of their conversation sat much as the butler had described him, a little bored and a little amused with the chatter of the Miss Millingtons. He felt, when he rose to go, that he had performed his duty manfully.

"So *very* kind of you to come," said Miss Millington, with the slightest linger in her handshake; "I'm sure it has done them all a *great* deal of good. It is so encouraging to find any one interested in our little work. Don't you agree with us that the men-servants being a class apart ought to be dealt with *as* a class apart?"

"It was ordained so by Providence," she added, as an answer, *sotto voce*, with a comforting recollection of the orthodox manner of explaining the Church Catechism, and a dim reverence for the far-reaching abilities of a Providence who entered

into such details as the designing of butlers in the scheme of Creation.

"Quite so," ejaculated Bella. "It has been a capital meeting, thanks to *you*. Good-bye!"

And she, too, enjoyed her handshake.

"Then may I ask you to look through these?" said Daisy plaintively, thrusting, desperately, a considerable bundle of papers into the Canon's hand. "The poor Cinder-Sifters——"

"Daisy, my love," said Miss Millington reproachfully, "I'm sure Canon Smith has quite enough things——"

"Not at all, not at all. I'll read them with pleasure, though I can't promise to help you, I fear. Good-bye."

"Ring the bell, Jane, dear," said Miss Millington. Whereupon the butler appeared in the hall to show Canon Smith out.

"Ahem!" said the butler, with his hand on the latch, "much obliged to you for your address, sir. We liked it."

The Canon looked at him keenly. The man's eyes were perfectly honest, and something told him there was no flattery in the remark.

"I'm very glad."

"Thank you, sir."

Now, the particular address in question had cost the Canon some experience, and he knew very well that his week's stay in St Moritz under disguise

had helped him in its composition. He had taken a line that would never have suggested itself to him a year ago.

The following morning was a glorious one, and, after Cathedral service, the Canon indulged in a ramble through the lovely meadowland outside Frattenbury. As he was returning he overtook Jane Rutland, who was leading by a string a very fat pug dog, clad in a blue coat.

He wished her "Good morning" as he overtook her, and made some remark about the dog, which she told him belonged to her aunts.

"They are devoted to him," she said with a smile; "I think he comes next to the men-servants and the cinder-sifters."

"And how do you like Frattenbury?" she asked presently, as they walked side by side.

"Well," he replied, "I hardly know yet. I've got to get used to it. Of course I find it very different from my parish at Market Shapborough."

"It is the first time you have lived in a Cathedral City?"

"Yes."

"Well," she said hesitatingly, "I confess I have been a little disappointed since I came here. I had never lived under the shadow of a Cathedral before, and somehow one expected something different."

"May I ask in what way?" said the Canon.

"Oh, I don't exactly know," she replied with a
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nervous little laugh; "only, when one contrasts the Cathedral itself and its grandeur with all the pettiness and cliqueism and gossip that the Close appears to breed, it seems, somehow, so out of place—I hope you don't mind my saying so?"

"Not at all. I have even begun to appreciate your meaning already."

"Have you, really? And then there's another thing that strikes me sometimes—I daresay it's wrong—but, frankly now, don't *you* think there's a great waste of energy? I don't mean anything personal, for I know you take an interest in outside things; but when I see all the Cathedral clergy doing very little else but holding daily services and attending tea-fights and garden-parties, and when I think, for instance, of that Vicar of St Agnes' parish, just outside the city walls, who has four or five thousand poor people to see to and can't afford a curate, it—well, it doesn't seem to me to be quite the sort of thing that He, in Whose Name the Cathedral stands, intended. Please, don't think me very silly for saying so."

The Canon was silent for a moment or two before he answered.

"Of course," he said slowly, "the dignity of the Cathedral and its services must be maintained."

"I quite agree with you. But sometimes even dignity ought to be sacrificed for the sake of others."

"I'm afraid," said the Canon, "that you are a little harsh in your judgment, but I own there is much in what you say. I have even thought so myself, sometimes. By the way, what is that big building—a little to the left of the Cathedral?"

"With the tall chimney? Oh, that contains the fortune-making machinery of Sir Daniel Taylor."

"Oh, I see—his brewery."

"Do you know," she replied, again with her nervous little laugh, "I couldn't help thinking, the other day, that they make a curious comparison."

"In what way?"

"The two great powers in the city—that spire and chimney — God and Mammon. Well, I am taking this path, and must wish you good morning

The Canon shook hands with her, and went on his way perplexed and thoughtful. Then the old text ran through his mind as he thought of her words — "Ye cannot serve God *and* Mammon."

He remembered the last Chapter meeting, to which the Dean's page-boy had alluded. And then his stick began twirling round and round: slowly at first, but increasing in speed. This never happened unless the worthy John Smith was particularly pleased with himself.

Entering the Close a quarter of an hour or so later, he saw the Dean walking ahead of him, arm-in-arm and in earnest conversation with the

portly and white-haired knight who was rejoicing in filling the office of Mayor of Frattenbury.

"Spire and chimney"—"God and Mammon."

What made the Canon purse up his lips and grasp his stick more firmly?

CHAPTER IX

IT was breakfast-time with the Miss Millingtons. The eldest of the three had finished reading prayers, the matutinal kisses and greetings had been duly given and received, James had brought in the coffee-urn, and the meal was about to be commenced.

Sundry letters lay beside the plate of each lady. The opening and reading of the morning correspondence was conducted upon a recognised system. Guesses were first hazarded concerning handwriting and postmarks. Then the letters were opened and read by their respective recipients, after which extracts from the correspondence were given for the general edification and discussion.

It had been suggested to Jane Rutland, when she had come, as an orphan, to live with her aunts, that she should follow the latter course of procedure; but she had strongly objected, much to the surprise of the others, who were also somewhat shocked to think that Janey might have secrets to conceal—"not the thing for a young girl!"

Bella had already successfully surmised from whom

were her share of the letters, and Miss Millington was saying:

"Ah—this is Mrs Percival's writing—she has been a long time answering. Who have *you* heard from, Daisy, dear? Some one from abroad, evidently," she muttered, replying, as usual, to herself. For Daisy was intently regarding a thin envelope with a blue foreign stamp.

"From Genoa," she said. "Oh, I know — it's from Katey Barrett. She promised to give me an account of her tour. I daresay there will be a message to you, Janey, from your friend Maud Caxton—unless you have heard from her?"

And she glanced suspiciously at Jane's correspondence.

"Oh no," replied the latter with a laugh. "We're great chums, Maud and I, but she only writes once in a blue moon. I hope's she's enjoying her trip with Mrs Barrett."

Daisy opened her letter and began to read it, complacently enough, but suddenly, when she was half-way through, the colour rushed to her cheeks, and then as suddenly left them. She took a sip of coffee with a half gasp, looking furtively at the others, who, being deep in their correspondence, did not notice her.

Then, when she had finished reading her letter, she folded it up, put it in its envelope, and slipped it quickly into her pocket. Immediately afterwards

she put a large spoonful of salt into her coffee, and attacked her under-boiled egg desperately with a fork.

"Well, Daisy, dear," said Miss Millington, after she had read extracts from her own correspondence and listened to Bella's, "and what have *you* got to tell us?"

"Oh," said Daisy, growing very red, "nothing particular. They are at Genoa."

"So the postmark told us," snapped Bella. "What else?"

"They've been staying at Mentone — and now they're in Italy," faltered Daisy.

"Of course they are," said Bella tartly, looking at Daisy severely and making the latter ten times more uncomfortable; "where else could Genoa be?"

"Daisy, darling," said Miss Millington in a tone of gentle and elder-sisterly reproof, "suppose you read us the letter? Bella and I know Mrs Barrett so well, and we should like to hear all about her."

Daisy put her hand in her pocket, and faltered:

"I didn't think you'd care to hear it," she said, getting more violently red.

"Daisy, what *is* the matter with you?" demanded Bella.

Then the unfortunate Daisy, completely cowed, opened the letter again and began:

"MY DEAREST DAISY,—I ought to have written to you before to tell you of our delightful time at Mentone. We have only just left there, and are

staying a couple of days at Genoa, making up our mind where we shall go to next. We are thinking of taking a little trip in Italy and the Lake District, but our plans are not quite matured yet. I find Maud Caxton a *charming* girl; she has been *very* attentive and useful. She sends her love to your niece, Janey, and a message that she will write soon.

"Well, dear, as I say, we had a *delightful* time in Mentone. The weather was *perfect* and the hotel most comfortable, and we met such *nice* people."

Here Daisy summoned up courage and stopped abruptly.

"Well?" exclaimed Miss Millington.

"Well?" echoed Bella.

"I'd — I'd rather not read any more," faltered Daisy, to the great amusement of Jane Rutland.

"Why not?" demanded both sisters imperatively, astounded at this declaration.

In abject despair Daisy passed the letter on to her eldest sister.

"Perhaps *you* had better read it," she murmured.

Miss Millington was not slow to take advantage of this request. Bella laid down her knife and fork to listen.

"But first of all I have quite a little scandal to tell you. Staying at our hotel in Mentone, a few weeks after Christmas, was an extraordinary clergyman whom I have since found out you must know something about. For is not your new Canon

named Smith? And is he not the Vicar of Market Shapborough? If so, he is the same man, and you will be interested to hear of his strange behaviour abroad. I'm sure it would make the Frattenbury people open their eyes——"

Here Miss Millington, who in her turn had grown suddenly red, paused in her reading, and perused the rest of the letter in silence, paying no attention to Bella's efforts to obtain further information.

When she had finished she kept possession of the letter.

"Daisy, my dear," she said, in slightly faltering tones, "you should have kept this till another time."

"But, Rose, dear, you asked me——" began the unfortunate Daisy.

"Never mind," said Bella sternly. "What *is* it, Rose? May I see?"

"Not now," said Miss Millington; "after breakfast we will discuss the matter between us. Jane," she went on, turning to her niece, "I particularly desire that you will not mention a word of this to *anybody*. It was not intended for your ears, and your Aunt Daisy would not care to have her letters talked about."

"Oh," said Jane, just a little ruffled, "I am not given to talking scandal—you needn't be afraid of me! Besides, there is nothing for me to mention. I haven't even heard what was Canon Smith's crime. Perhaps he went to the Carnival in a domino."

"Janey," said Bella, "it is out of place for you to discuss a Cathedral dignitary like this. I'm ashamed of you!"

Jane shrugged her shoulders, and said:

"Why shouldn't he wear a domino if he wants to?"

"Jane!" exclaimed Miss Millington with terrible dignity, "you are positively indecent to hint at such things."

"On the contrary," said Jane, "a domino is one of the most decent of garments—for either sex. And almost monastic, too—quite ecclesiastical."

The three spinsters regarded her with an awful frown. When the uncomfortable remainder of the breakfast was over, a solemn consultation was held, Jane not being present.

"First," said Miss Millington, "I will read you the rest of the letter."

And she read as follows:

"He only stayed a week at the hotel, but he created quite a sensation. Every day he went over to Monte Carlo and played at the gambling tables—we saw him there *ourselves* (of course, dear, *we* only went out of curiosity, and a degrading sight it was!). He played for very high stakes, and I hear that he used dreadful language when he lost. Then, at the hotel, he was *quite intoxicated* on one occasion. He drank enormous quantities of champagne. And he sat up half the night playing bridge, and smoking with some very questionable-looking men. He was dressed in clerical clothes

all the time, and didn't seem a bit ashamed of himself. He gave his name as Mr Smith, and we only found out quite by accident who he was. He had been sitting out on the verandah, near us, and as he took out his tobacco-pouch I saw something fall from his pocket. Of course I *couldn't* speak to him to tell him of it. He got up to go, and I picked up his card-case (that is what he had dropped), with the intention of giving it to the hotel porter. I really *couldn't* resist the temptation to look inside—and, after all, a card-case is public property, in a sense. There was his name and address—'The Reverend John Smith, the Vicarage, Market Shapborough'—on his card.

"I didn't attach any importance to this—except that I felt pity for the people of Market Shapborough. But, last evening, I happened to pick up an old copy of the *Church Times* in the hotel, and there I saw a reference to the new *Canon Smith—Vicar of Market Shapborough and Canon of Frattenbury Cathedral*. I am writing to you *at once*, as I felt sure you would be interested. It seems he *must* be the same man.

"The Mr Smith of Mentone was of medium height—about fifty—clean-shaven—hair slightly tinged with grey——"

"Oh!"

It was a little shriek from Bella that interrupted Miss Millington's reading.

"How dreadful! How positively dreadful!"

"It *can't* be true," said Daisy, "there *must* be some mistake!"

"He has had tea in this very house!" ejaculated Miss Millington.

"And addressed the members of the Guild of St Roger," put in Bella.

"And promised to read about the Cinder-Sisters!" sighed Daisy.

"What is to be done?" said Miss Millington. "What is to be done? Something must be done."

"But it may be all a mistake," said the miserable Daisy. "I *can't* think it of him—he is so nice, isn't he, Bella?"

"He is a Canon of Frattenbury Cathedral," replied Bella, ignoring the adjective, "and, being so, it is difficult to believe this terrible story. The Cathedral clergy have always been irreproachable. This is a great shock."

"What is to be *done*?" repeated Miss Millington.

"Nothing," ventured Daisy; "let us give him the benefit of the doubt and say nothing."

"That would not be right," replied Miss Millington struggling within herself; "if the story is true it ought to be known."

There was a painful silence, broken by Miss Millington.

"I know!" she exclaimed triumphantly.

"What?"

"I shall show the Dean the letter—in strict confidence."

"The Dean is a dear man," murmured Bella.

"But it is *my* letter," said Daisy.

"That is nothing to do with it. The Dean must see it. *He* will know what is best to be done."

Daisy expostulated in vain, and then gave in. Bella reluctantly agreed that the Dean ought to be told. Finally, all three ladies looked upon the telling of him as a Christian duty, and each admitted, strictly to herself, that the performance of Christian duty implied something of the pains of martyrdom, and each hoped that the Dean would be able to throw some light upon the subject—to the effect that the Canon's innocence might be established.

An hour later, and Miss Millington was closeted with the Dean in his study. He read the fatal letter carefully, his eyebrows rising more and more as he did so.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, when he had finished.
"Dear *me*!"

"We thought we ought to tell you," said Miss Millington nervously. "What do you think of it?"

"You have acted quite rightly. It is extraordinary—most extraordinary."

And he read the letter through again.

"You don't think," said the half-repentant Miss Millington in the tone of voice of one who imagined the process to be a literal one, with a possibility of its being performed in her presence—as the accuser, "you don't think that he is in danger of being unfrocked? I hope not, I hope not."

"Do not alarm yourself," said the Dean. "It certainly sounds like an — ahem — indiscretion on Canon Smith's part, but we will hope, for his sake as well as for the sake of all of us, that there is some mistake. It may, of course, have been some other clergyman who possessed some of his cards. We must not judge hastily. I should be sorry to think that one of the Cathedral clergy——" and he paused, his mind horror-struck at his own thoughts.

"Have you Mrs Barrett's address?" he asked presently. "I notice that 'Genoa' is the only address on this letter."

"No. And you see her plans are uncertain, and that she is leaving Genoa."

"Hum! Well, I will see. Say nothing of this to any one—and tell your sisters not to mention it."

"Yes—yes."

When she was gone the Dean pondered over the affair in silence, coming to his inevitable conclusion that his wife's opinion might be worth having. So he sought his spouse and laid the case before her.

"What do you think of it, Octavia?"

Octavia pursed her lips together and jerked her head forward.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she exclaimed.

"Knew *what*?" asked the astonished Dean; "surely *you* hadn't heard anything——"

"I mean I knew that a man who was capable of attending that Ratepayers' meeting and voting

against *you* in the Chapter would be capable of *anything*. I'm not surprised."

"But, my dear," suggested the Dean, "this is only a rumour. There is nothing much to go upon——"

"Leave it to *me*," said his wife; "I'll soon find out if there's any truth in it."

And she sat down at her writing-table and began to scribble a note.

"What are you doing, Octavia?"

"Asking Canon Smith to come and lunch with us to-morrow. *Then* we shall see."

"But surely you don't mean to charge him——"

"Of course not. There are *other* methods. . . . There! If you ring the bell, Charles can take this round at once. I've had my suspicions of that man all along. You've been too easy with him."

"You will not mention this to any one?"

"My dear!"

Nevertheless she told her bosom friend in the Close that very afternoon that there was a strange rumour about Canon Smith.

"It's something to do with his behaviour on the Continent, my dear. Of course it's only hearsay, but it is *curious*. I *never* talk scandal, so I won't even tell *you* any more. Besides, there *may* be no truth in it. And this is in *strict* confidence. I wouldn't have it mentioned for worlds."

Wherefore, before the week was out, all the Close knew that there was "*something*" about the

Canon, and the Miss Millingtons put it down to Jane.

The next day the Canon was eking out the minute portion of jelly which had been bestowed upon him at lunch, when the Dean's wife, with a quick preliminary glance at her husband, commenced the attack.

"We hear you are writing another book. How are you getting on with it?"

"Pretty well, thanks," replied the unsuspecting Canon; "most of the work is really done."

"Oh yes. You were collecting materials for it abroad when the Canonry was vacant, were you not?"

"Yes. I was at Zürich."

"Charming place. Did you stay there all the time you were away?"

"No."

"Ah," broke in the Dean, who understood now the method of attack, "and where else did you go? If I remember rightly it was some time before we knew if you had accepted the Canonry, owing to the offer not reaching you."

"Yes," replied the Canon, feeling a little uncomfortable, "I was travelling."

"Indeed?" said the Dean's wife. "In Switzerland?"

"Yes—er—that is—not entirely," said the Canon, falling into the trap and speaking truthfully, for a few miles of his return journey *via* Como had been

through Italy; "I—er—went a little trip afterwards—that is, I did not return home at once."

"Quite so," went on the Dean's wife cheerfully; "you went southwards, I suppose? The Riviera is always so delightful at the end of January."

"Oh, it is," floundered the Canon, relieved to have avoided the mention of St Moritz, and unknowingly putting his foot in it all the more, while his face became painfully red, and he broke his bread into small pieces.

"Cheese?" enquired the Dean blandly. "And I trust you had a pleasant tour?"

"Oh, very, very," replied the Canon hastily. "By the way, Mr Dean, talking of my book, I think you have a work in your library which I rather want to consult—if you will allow me?"

"With pleasure," replied the Dean.

A sardonic smile of triumph glittered across Octavia's face as she rose from the table, leaving the two men to their coffee.

And immediately the Canon had left the house she said to her husband:

"Well, what did I tell you? Did you see how he avoided all mention of what he did after leaving Zürich?"

The Dean shook his head sadly.

"I fear there is something in it," he said.

"Something in it? Of *course* there is. I *knew* there must be. What do you propose to do?"

"Well, my dear, I hardly know. Perhaps I ought to inform the Bishop——"

"Rubbish! You are quite capable of dealing with the matter yourself. Canon Smith is *your* subordinate in the Chapter."

"Or," went on the Dean, catching at a straw of manly honesty, "it might be as well to tell the Canon plainly this rumour about him, and ask him to explain it. It is the more open course."

His wife gave him a withering look.

"You are not justified in doing any such thing!" she snapped, her head poking forward in her decisive manner. "In the first place, this was told you in confidence. In the second place, Canon Smith has been giving you a great deal of unnecessary trouble. He has interfered in concerns which he ought to have left alone. Now," she went on, shaking her forefinger at him, "if he goes too far you will have a hold over him. You take my advice and keep it to yourself—for the present."

And the Dean, being weak in spite of his dignity, acquiesced in this advice.

A few days later Miss Millington met him, and asked him anxiously if there was any news.

"Ahem!" he replied, "this is a delicate matter, Miss Millington. There is little to go upon, and I think the best thing is to take no notice of Mrs Barrett's letter."

Miss Millington was sadly mystified.

"*Ought* we to allow him to call—or ask him to tea?" she asked her sisters. "I'm sure I don't know what to think about it."

"It seems a shame to suspect him if we don't know for certain," remarked Daisy.

"I *don't* suspect him," snapped Bella. "Mrs Barrett was always a gossip."

"It wasn't my fault," pleaded the unhappy Daisy.

"No one is accusing you of such a thing, Daisy, dear," said Miss Millington sententiously, "though we shall be glad when you hear again from Mrs Barrett. *I* think we ought to give him the benefit of the doubt—for the present."

"Still," said the contradictory Bella, with a crushing glance at Daisy, "the letter was very circumstantial—it is difficult."

"It *is* difficult!" sighed Miss Millington. "I *wish*, Daisy, you had not read so much of that letter before Jane."

CHAPTER X

SIR DANIEL TAYLOR had evidently come down to breakfast in rather a bad temper, or else, to judge by the way he turned his newspaper, there had been a debate in the House on the Licensing Question, and the Temperance party had scored in a division. Eleanor sat opposite to him, quietly eating her breakfast, and looking from time to time with a half-amused smile at her father's face. She knew very well that a storm was brewing, and was only waiting for it to break.

Sir Daniel Taylor was a portly individual with clean-shaven, rubicund face, rather thick, pouting lips, rounded chin, flabby cheeks, and iron-grey hair. He wore a continuous look of self-satisfaction and importance, for he considered that he had a right to both. His pocket was well lined, he was the Chief Magistrate of Frattenbury, a very influential member of the County Conservative Association, and his Sovereign had been pleased to bestow the honour of knighthood upon him as a reward for having grown rich and having served his "Party."

There were folks—in their second childhood—who

could remember Sir Daniel's father when the latter was a respectable haberdasher in Frattenbury. But it was doubtful whether Sir Daniel himself ever remembered it. At all events, nobody reminded him of it.

Presently, with an angry grunt, Sir Daniel laid down his paper, and the storm began.

"Eleanor, I want to talk to you very seriously."

"Shall I ring to have the breakfast cleared away first?" she asked; "you are apt to be lengthy when you talk seriously."

"I don't wish to be interrupted," said her father, turning a shade redder, "and I wish *you* to be serious for once, if you can."

"I will be as serious as if you were on the bench and I was — a policeman. I believe that is the acme of seriousness."

"Eleanor, I beg that you will not jest."

"I'm not jesting. Go on, I'm listening."

"I had a visit from Mr Horne last evening," began Sir Daniel.

"Oh, had you?" replied Eleanor; "and how is his uncle, the Dean?"

"I don't wish to speak about his uncle," said Sir Daniel testily; "I wish the conversation to be confined strictly to himself."

"Certainly," said Eleanor imperturbably. "Are you thinking of dealing with him? Because I hear that his fish is infinitely better than Webster's."

"Eleanor, once and for all I insist upon your being serious. Mr Horne's visit concerned *you*."

He looked at her critically, but, receiving no reply, went on.

"He came to ask for my consent to your hand in marriage," he said half pompously and half indignantly.

Eleanor stirred her coffee serenely.

"Ah," she replied, "he told me he was going to see you on the subject."

"I consider the whole question is preposterous—outrageous. What business had he to say anything at all to you? And how dared he, under existing circumstances, come to ME?"

"It is the usual proceeding, I believe," replied Eleanor demurely. "Everett acted upon the conventional lines, and you are such an upholder of conventionality that I should think you ought to be pleased with him."

"Pleased with him!" cried Sir Daniel. "I tell you the thing is preposterous. I told him so."

"Did you give any reasons?"

"Of course I gave reasons, plenty of them."

"Perhaps you told him his family was not good enough for a brewer's daughter," said Eleanor with a laugh. "Let me see; the Hornes come from Dorsetshire, I believe. Everett's mother was the Honourable Isabella Monkhurst. His father, the Dean's brother, was in the Diplomatic Service,

before he retired. And I hear there is a rumour that his other uncle, General Horne, will be given an important command abroad."

She brought out these names with wicked emphasis, a merry twinkle in her eye.

"Yes—yes—I know," stammered Sir Daniel, "his family is an excellent one, and the Dean and I are on the best of terms. It—it isn't that at all. It's the man himself I object to—his ridiculous Radical nonsense, his interfering ways, and—and the absurdity of his taking up a fishmongery business here."

"I don't see that the latter need upset you, father ; it is an honest way of getting a living. Besides, we're in trade ourselves."

"You must realise the distinction, Eleanor."

"Only the distinction between the indefinite and the definite article—Everett's is '*a*' trade, ours is '*the*' trade, as I know you like to call it."

"It is quite a different thing," said Sir Daniel pompously.

"I agree with you. I prefer Everett's business."

"Eleanor," said Sir Daniel with a frown, speaking severely and making a strenuous effort to be calm, "I repeat that the whole question is preposterous. I do not say—and I told him as much—that if Everett Horne would give up all associations with the Radical element in Frattenbury, which associations at the present juncture constitute a personal insult to myself, and if he were to dispose of his

business and seek some—ahem—avocation more suitable for his station, I do not say that I would raise any objection to his proposals, but, as it is——”

And he waved his hand majestically.

“I’ll tell you what, father,” replied Eleanor, “if you object so strongly to the fishmongery business, I might ask him to give it up and then *you* might start us in something.”

“What?”

“Give him a public-house,” rejoined Eleanor. “I heard you say the ‘Blue Lion’ was worth four or five hundred a year to a steady, go-ahead man. And I could help. How would you fancy me standing behind the bar drawing your beer—like this?”

And she jumped up with a merry laugh, and suited the action to the word.

“Taylor’s sparkling mild ale!” she cried, handing him an imaginary glass.

Sir Daniel turned very red and angry.

“Eleanor, I desire that you do not make a mockery of my—my—profession,” he exclaimed; “and I tell you, once and for all, that I am very naturally opposed to this match.”

“Very well,” said Eleanor dutifully. “You want me to give him up, I suppose. After all, I don’t know that I very much care for the prospect of the Dean and his wife for my uncle and aunt. And if General Horne came to stay with us, he’d sure to be fussy, and——”

Sir Daniel brought his hand down upon the table.

"How you do run on!" he interrupted. "Can't you see my position? I have told you that—that——"

"You are definitely opposed to our engagement, and that it is preposterous."

"I said nothing of the sort. I intimated that so long as Everett Horne continued chairman of the Ratepayers' Association, and—and——"

"A fishmonger!"

"Don't interrupt me. Yes—exactly. I *don't* object to—to——"

"His relatives."

"Don't interrupt me, Eleanor. I—I—of course, I consider that his relatives—are——"

"I don't want to marry his relatives."

"Confound it!" exclaimed Sir Daniel, "I am putting the case as plainly as I can. I will *not* consent to this engagement under existing circumstances—but—but——"

"Thank you, father," she said, "I'm glad he *has* got points that interest you. I shall tell him what you say. We are going for a bicycle ride together this afternoon. It's early closing day. That's one of the consolations of his business—he gets an afternoon a week. I think, after all, I shan't press him to take the 'Blue Lion.' It means Sunday work. That's another distinction between the two trades!"

"I forbid you to—to—speak to him."

"Father! And his uncle is the Dean!"

Sir Daniel snatched up his paper and rose from the table.

"Tell him what I say!" he exclaimed, as he went out of the room and banged the door. Eleanor remained, laughing heartily.

"So you see, dear," she said to Everett as they were riding in the country outside Frattenbury that afternoon, "if you were only a Conservative and would give up keeping shop, I believe he would give us his paternal blessing in the most approved style."

Everett laughed.

"And what do *you* say about it, Eleanor?" he asked.

She looked at him with a softer light in her eyes and a smile on her face.

"I just admire your pluck," she said—"first because of the way you've fought through thick and thin in the cause of reform—although it's against my father; and secondly, because you're earning an honest livelihood and don't care what people say or think about you."

"And you wouldn't really mind being a fishmonger's wife, darling?"

"Not a bit, dear. Why should I? And," she added softly, "you see I've made up my mind to be a fishmonger's wife whatever happens."

"Even if your father still refuses?"

"I somehow think that will be all right; but, if he refuses, isn't it for me to ask if you'll still have me, Everett?"

"Why, dear?"

“ The proverbial shilling.”

“ Nonsense ! Your love is enough to warrant my taking you into partnership.”

“ In the fish business ? ”

“ Yes, dear—and share profits ! ”

A convenient hill offered an opportunity for walking. On the top they sat down to rest. Their conversation presently turned on the campaign for the improvement of Palmer's Alley.

“ Do you know,” he said, “ who is likely to be one of my chief helpers ? ”

“ Is it Canon Smith ? ”

“ Yes. What made you think so ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know. I have heard father speak of him as being rather troublesome to the Dean and Chapter, and you told me he was at one of your meetings.”

“ I like the man immensely, though I can't quite understand him yet.”

“ H'm ! A woman generally has more insight. Let me see if I can sum him up. Well, does he strike you as a man who is naturally inclined to be broad-minded, with a strong touch of humour in his composition, but who has lived for many years in a narrow groove—an ecclesiastical groove—until something happened recently which set him thinking—which made him a little bit more human, and so he is hardly out of the transition stage yet, but will come boldly to the front before long ? ”

“ By George, Eleanor ! ” exclaimed Everett Horne, “ you’ve put into words just the very feeling I had about him.”

She smiled.

“ I’m right, then, you think ? ”

“ Yes, dear ; but I’m a little bit puzzled over some rumours about him.”

“ What rumours ? ” she asked quickly. “ Who has been saying anything about him ? ”

“ My uncle.”

“ The Dean ? ”

“ Yes. Of course he dislikes him, and that may account for it. But I’ll tell you. I saw the old boy yesterday, and, as usual, he made some nasty remarks about my business and my ‘ Anarchical views,’ as he chooses to call them. Then he began talking about the Canon, pumping me to find out what I knew about him.”

“ In what way ? ”

“ Well, he knows I go round to Canon Smith’s sometimes. He asked whether the Canon ever mentioned his recent tour abroad, where he went to, and so on.”

Eleanor was deeply interested.

“ Go on,” she said.

“ Presently I saw something was up, and I asked him point blank what he was trying to get out of me. He wouldn’t say at first, till I hinted I might tell Smith he’d been questioning me about his affairs.

Then he said, in that precise manner of his : ‘ Well, there is a strange rumour—*only* a rumour, understand—that has reached my ears about the Canon’s behaviour when he was abroad early in the year. I can’t tell you any more—it’s a confidential matter.’ ”

“ ‘ Have you mentioned it to him and given him a chance of explaining ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ Well—ahem—not exactly—that is, I *did* question him about his tour abroad, but his answers were evasive, peculiarly evasive—and I am afraid there must be something in the report.’ ”

Eleanor leaned back on the bank on which they were sitting and laughed heartily.

“ Poor Canon Smith ! ” she exclaimed. “ I wonder who has been giving him away—not that he’s done anything to be ashamed of.”

“ Do *you* know anything about it ? ” Everett asked in astonishment.

“ My dear, I know the whole story—it’s screamingly funny. I’ll tell you.”

And she related the St Moritz incident, much to his amusement.

“ He had evidently discarded his clerical clothes from a sense of freedom,” she said ; “ though I must say his choice of lay garments was rather a striking one.”

“ He may have borrowed them from a friend.”

“ Very likely. I believe he had come to St Moritz with the idea of enjoying himself quite innocently,

but unshackled. Why shouldn't he? And he hadn't been made Canon then, you know. I had my shrewd suspicions almost from the first that he was a parson—they can't often disguise themselves effectually—but I kept them to myself, of course. I confess I enjoyed drawing him out and leading him on. Oh, Everett, you *ought* to have seen him as a 'Cheshire Cat' rolling in the snow!"

"I wish I had. Good old Canon Smith! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was my reading the letter from my father to Mrs Findlay at the dinner-table that must have frightened him. He realised that I came from Frattenbury—and the best of the joke was that the letter was about him! He was off by the early *diligence* the next morning."

"But," said Everett, "I can't quite understand how it is he has not recognised you here?"

"He *has* recognised me! Of course I never dreamed of meeting him again as Canon Smith, and I often wondered why he left St Moritz in such a hurry. But the instant I set eyes on him here—it was at the Millingtons'—I recognised him. Then I saw that he knew me, and I waited to see what he would do. It was a situation I enjoyed immensely."

"What did he do?"

"He was awfully nervous, and I saw at once that he was terribly afraid I should know him. I

suppose he was afraid of what the Close set would think of his harmless little escapade ; so I pretended not to recognise him, and he *was* so relieved."

" Eleanor, you're a brick ! "

" Why should I give him away ? I sympathise with the man, and I'm sure his pretending to be a layman broadened his mind. *That's* why he's coming out so strongly."

" But some one has been gossiping ? "

" So it appears. But it's evidently only a rumour."

" When he hears of it he'll suspect you."

" He may—no, somehow I don't think he will. I can't help it if he does. Well, that's the whole story, Everett."

" So we had better say nothing about it ? "

" Of course. There were no other Frattenbury people up at St Moritz, and Mrs Findlay is not likely to come here. I don't suppose the Dean really knows anything, and the rumour will die out very soon."

They little knew that the real rumour was a very different one, and far worse than they imagined. There was one person who was secretly worrying over it a great deal, and that was Jane Rutland. Every now and then the Miss Millingtons, who were terribly perplexed among themselves, would drop little hints and innuendoes by which Jane saw very clearly that the Canon was suspected in high places of some grave impropriety which had

happened in Mentone. Now, the girl had a very strict sense of justice—it was the strongest point of her character—and the more she knew of the Canon's work in Frattenbury and the difficult standpoint he was beginning to take, the less could she bear to think that he was under a cloud, and was hoping that there must have been some mistake. If she had only known her friend's address abroad she would have written at once, for her own satisfaction, as well as in the hope of clearing the Canon from this mysterious scandal which was hovering over his unconscious head in the sacred precincts of the Close. She had already discovered that her aunts had told the Dean about it, and her instinctive dislike for that pompous individual made her sense of justice the more acute, especially as the Miss Millingtons had extracted her promise not to mention the matter.

At length a determination took possession of her. It required some courage, and her face turned a little pale as she arranged her hat before the glass. She sallied forth from her aunt's house and walked through the Close. Her steps became slower as she neared the house apportioned to the Canon in Residence, and she faltered for a moment or two before she opened the gate and made her way up to the entrance. Then she rang the bell firmly, and set her face to "see it through."

A middle-aged housekeeper opened the door.

"Is Canon Smith at home?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Can I see him?"

The housekeeper, who had been accustomed at Market Shapborough to all sorts and conditions of visitors, evinced no surprise, but ushered the girl into a stuffy drawing-room, which was evidently never used by the bachelor Canon, drew up the blinds and went to tell her master.

He came into the room a minute later, and she rose to greet him, a slight blush on her cheek.

"How do you do, Miss Rutland?"

"How do you do, Canon Smith?"

"Please sit down."

There was an awkward pause after they were both seated, during which the Canon waited expectantly for the reason of the visit.

"I came to see you——" she began, and hesitated.

"Certainly. Tell me what I can do for you."

His face was kindly and his manner reassuring.

"I wanted to ask you a question."

"By all means. If I can help you in anything, please tell me."

"You are very kind, but I am afraid you may think me inquisitive, or even impertinent."

"No, I'm sure I shall not. Tell me what it is."

"Well," she blurted out, coming to the point at once, "it's a strange question. Were you in Mentone in the early part of the year?"

"No, certainly not," he replied, wondering what she meant. "I've never been to Mentone in my life."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a half sigh of relief. "Or anywhere in the Riviera?"

"I am an utter stranger to the whole district. Why do you ask?"

"I'm very glad," she murmured; "I didn't think you could have been there. It's of no consequence."

She half rose to go, but he stopped her with a gesture.

"But is that all you wanted to ask me?"

"Yes. I'm so much obliged to you."

"But," he said with a little smile, "I'm afraid I don't quite understand. You wanted me to help you about something."

"Oh, not at all—really."

"If I had any knowledge of Mentone I might have been of some use, perhaps?"

"No—no—I don't think so. Thank you so much."

And she stood up holding out her hand to wish him good-bye.

"But why did you ask me such a question?"

She looked at him almost appealingly, her courage was ebbing a little.

"Do you mind if I don't tell you?" she said, remembering her promise to her aunts. "I had a reason—indeed, I had. And I'm so very much obliged to you. Good afternoon!"

Instinct told him to say no more, and he shook hands with her and showed her to the door. On the threshold she turned to him for a moment.

"Don't think me absolutely mad," she exclaimed, "but you've eased my mind."

He returned to the house wondering at the strangeness of the interview. He was feeling interested in this quiet girl, and, the more he thought it over, the more it seemed to him that in some way or other her visit had concerned him personally more than she cared to say. It puzzled him.

That evening the subject of Canon Smith's lapse abroad was again raised by the Miss Millingtons.

"I wonder, Daisy," said the eldest of the three, "when you will hear again from Mrs Barrett?"

"I think," broke in Bella, "that you ought to arrange your correspondence better, Daisy, instead of keeping us in suspense."

"I can't help it, dear," replied Daisy; "if Katey Barrett doesn't choose to give me her address it isn't my fault."

"Well, we shall be glad to hear," said Miss Millington; "if there is any truth in this report, it ought to be seen to. If there is no truth in it, we ought to know. Don't you think so, Bella? I am sure we ought to know," she added to herself. "It is too bad of Daisy's friend to keep us waiting."

Jane looked up quietly from her needlework.

"There is no truth at all in it, Auntie," she said.

"How do you know, dear?"—"Have you heard from Maud Caxton? I didn't see a letter from her this morning."—"Why didn't you say you'd heard, Janey?" chorused the three spinsters.

"I have not heard. But I know there's no truth in the report—whatever it is."

"How do you know, dear?"

"Because Canon Smith has never been to Mentone—nor anywhere else in the Riviera," replied Jane, half afraid of her own boldness.

"And what right have you to say such a thing, Janey?" asked Miss Millington, in a tone half of relief, half of astonishment; "who told you he has never been to Mentone?"

"He told me so himself."

"What?" said Daisy.

"When?" cried Miss Millington.

"How came he to tell you?" said Bella, whose rasping voice drowned those of her sisters.

Jane turned to her a little uncomfortably.

"I asked him."

"*You asked him!*" ejaculated the astounded Miss Millington.

"*You asked him!*" echoed her sisters.

"Yes," said Janey boldly; "I thought it a shame that he should be lying under an accusation if there was no truth in it, and—and—I saw him to-day—and asked him if he had ever been to Mentone—and he hasn't."

The spinsters looked at each other in shocked silence which Miss Millington was the first to break.

"It was an exceedingly forward and unladylike thing to do," she said stiffly.

Jane grew very hot.

"Not more unladylike than talking about him behind his back and not giving him a chance of explaining!" she retorted.

"Jane!" Miss Millington sat bolt upright and folded her hands in her lap. "Jane—you forget yourself!"

Jane bit her lip and said nothing.

"You didn't tell him what the rumour was, and that *we* were talking about it, I hope?" said Bella, turning a shade redder.

"I don't know what the rumour is, and I promised you I would say nothing," replied Jane with quiet dignity.

When she had retired for the night, the Miss Millingtons sat up discussing the state of affairs.

"Well," remarked the eldest finally, "I *trust* Jane is right."

"I hope so," said Daisy.

"Nonsense!" snapped Bella, after a pause. "The Dean said he evaded questions. He is only prevaricating. It is dreadful!"

And that brought it all on again.

CHAPTER XI

MUNICIPAL affairs in Frattenbury were the subject of much discussion, the greater part of which was confined to the subject of the property which was owned respectively by the Mayor and the Dean and Chapter. For a long time past the City Council had been content to pursue the even tenor of its way, and had both overawed the Borough Surveyor and discouraged him from making any complaints against the property in question—or, in fact, any property which was owned by the individual members of the Council or their particular cronies. It was felt that Sir Daniel Taylor was a power in the land against whom it would be injudicious to take strong measures, and that the Dean and Chapter were a body who were best left to manage their own business—besides which, Sir Daniel and the “Close set” patronised the shops belonging to the worthy aldermen and councillors, and human nature plays a strong part where cash-book and ledger are concerned.

Of course Everett Horne was a thorn in the flesh to the Town Council. He had organised the

Ratepayers' Association." At first the latter was pooh-poohed as ridiculous, but it was now beginning to take strong root among the good burgesses of Frattenbury. At every meeting of the Town Council a deputation, headed by Everett Horne and armed with note-books, solemnly attended to watch and listen to the proceedings. Of course it was not lawful for them to make remarks, but, on the other hand, it had become an ordeal for each councillor to open his mouth in the presence of these judicial witnesses. Hitherto the representatives of the Press had been strictly judicious as to what they reported, but the pamphlets issued by the Ratepayers' Association contained more accurate accounts of the Council meetings, and did not spare the grammatical blunders of the speakers.

By degrees, and somewhat to his own astonishment, Canon Smith had found himself more and more in open sympathy with the objects of the Association. He had moved, at a meeting of the Chapter, that the property belonging to that body should be put into thorough sanitary repair, but his motion had not been seconded. He had preached a powerful sermon on the text, "Am I my brother's keeper?" at which the Mayor, who was seated in the Corporation pew, was highly indignant. Highest test of all, men who habitually looked askance at parsons and sundry members of Nonconformist congregations touched their hats to the "Canon in Residence" when they

met him in the street. Canon Smith had grown bold in the assertion of social rights, and only Eleanor Taylor and Everett Horne understood the curious process by which he had arrived at his conclusions.

Rice, the tobacconist, saw him crossing the road one day from St Roger's Gate to his shop. In the twinkling of an eye he had jumped on a chair, reached down a tin of "Southern Mixture," and had it standing on the counter by the time the Canon was at the door. The latter smiled, as he remembered his first purchase.

"Good morning, Canon Smith."

"Good morning," replied the Canon affably, taking out his purse.

"I suppose you are coming to the meeting?" said the tobacconist, jerking his thumb towards one of the familiar notices.

"Which?" asked the Canon drily.

Rice turned his head to look. There were two notices hanging side by side, one of a Ratepayers' meeting, the other of a "Free Thought" lecture entitled, "The Bible a Fraud!"

He muttered a half apology, and, stepping to the notice in question, was on the point of removing it.

"Stop," said the Canon stoutly; "I don't want you to do that. I believe in freedom of thought myself—although it has never shown me that the Bible is a fraud—and I don't think it's likely to prove that proposition to any really thinking

man. So I'm not afraid of any notice of that sort."

"Well," said Rice a little shamefacedly, "you can't expect us to believe all the Bible says. I don't want to offend you, but I must be honest."

"I daresay I have studied the Bible from a critical point of view, quite as much as this lecturer," said the Canon; "but, at all events, I am glad to see that the Bible has a hold on you, though you are strangely inconsistent."

"I don't quite understand."

"Why, in placing those two bills side by side. One of them announces that the Bible is a fraud, while the other contains a notice of a meeting that I can only conceive owes its existence to the teaching of the Bible—the law of love and self-sacrifice for the welfare of others. Yes—I certainly hope to be present. Good morning."

"Well," said the tobacconist to himself, "he had me there! There's something in what he said."

Again he began taking down the "Free Thought" notice, when he suddenly caught sight of the Dean emerging from St Roger's Gate.

He waited in expectancy, and enjoyed the situation immensely when he marked how the Dean glanced at both notices and frowned spontaneously. Then when the objectionable dignitary had passed, he took the placard down and tore it in pieces.

The meeting of the Ratepayers' Association was

held that evening, and the Canon, as he had promised, was there. He took his seat near the front of the room, prepared to act as a listener. The hall was filled to its full extent with men whose faces proclaimed that they were set on business, for notice had been given that a very important resolution was to be moved.

A stamping of feet and a clapping of hands announced the entrance of the Chairman and Committee, and the latter slowly made their way up the centre of the hall from the room at the back where they had assembled, Everett Horne leading the way.

As he drew near the platform he noticed the familiar figure of Canon Smith. A sudden impulse seized him, and going up and laying his hand on his shoulder, he said:

"Won't you come on the platform, Canon Smith?"

"Oh, thank you. Really, I am only here as a spectator."

"Do come! We should be so glad to have you among us—supporting us."

"If you really wish it?"

"Most certainly I do."

Whereupon the Canon heroically mounted the platform, a voice from the back of the room calling out:

"Bravo, parson!"

He felt a little nervous at first as he watched the sea of faces in front of him, accustomed as he

was to audiences and congregations. He realised the enormous power of these men, banded together in united action, and the Chairman's opening remarks fell unheeded upon his ear.

He was thinking out a problem. What was the motive that had called these men together? It was something deeper than the spirit of fighting, though that had its part in the work. It was the spirit of justice and fair play, so dear to an Englishman's heart. It was an altruistic spirit also. Only a minority of those present had anything personal to be gained in the question immediately before them. On the contrary, many of them were in danger of being losers; but they would not suffer injustice to others. Some time ago he had read a paper at a clerical meeting, deploring the scanty attendance of the male sex at church, and had complained that men were indifferent to the influences of religion. And yet he remembered telling Rice that very morning that it was a distinctly Christian influence which was at work convening the present meeting. This was true. Surely there was an inference which was hard to face, and which, nevertheless, he was beginning to acknowledge. If a distinctly Christian influence could bring together such a meeting as this for a purely altruistic purpose, there was something lacking in the methods of ecclesiasticism, and that something was the attraction of practical Christian ethics.

The truth was gripping him. Christian ethics were something more, or ought to be something more, than a pulpit commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.

"I will call upon Mr Groves," said the Chairman, "to move a Resolution. I have already explained to you that the Town Council has refused to act upon our suggestion, and it is time that we commenced a stronger attack than ever. The Resolution, if passed, will be forwarded to the Town Clerk, and the Committee of Sanitary Supervision will have ample time to embody it in their report for the consideration of the next Council meeting. It is this: 'That this meeting of the citizens of Frattenbury considers it a duty to lay the sanitary condition of certain parts of the city before the Local Government Board, if immediate action is not taken for the rectifying of the same by the Town Council.'"

An outburst of cheering greeted this announcement, during which the mover of the Resolution stood up, prepared to speak.

As soon as he had begun, Everett Horne scribbled something on a bit of paper, folded it and handed it to his neighbour, with a whispered request to pass it to Canon Smith. When the latter opened it he read these words: "Will you speak to the Resolution when it has been seconded?"

The Canon thought for a minute. He had gone

much further than he had intended already. But the enthusiasm of the meeting was upon him, and, setting his lips together, he wrote "Yes" on the paper and sent it back to the Chairman.

In a short time the latter was on his feet, announcing "Canon Smith."

There was a silence as the Canon rose to speak, a silence of expectancy. His speech was quite short and to the point, quiet and dignified. He began by saying that he acquiesced in the Resolution on moral grounds, and not from any party spirit; that he had had opportunity of seeing for himself that this particular reform was needed, and that, although being only a three-monthly resident in the year among them, he could hardly claim the honour of being a burgess, still he was free to speak as a representative of the Church, "a body that should be forward in taking up any cause for the ethical as well as the spiritual welfare of the community." Many of those present had no clear notion as to the meaning of the word "ethical," but grasped the sentiment implied, and shouted "Hear, hear!" with the rest.

He carefully refrained from alluding to any action he had taken in the Chapter, and concluded by saying: "I am not an advocate of strong measures, except in cases of urgent necessity. But in this instance it certainly appears to me that if those who are appointed by the public vote are dilatory

in dealing with questions that are justly raised by a number of their fellow-citizens, it is only reasonable to appeal to a higher court having power to enquire into the matter with a view to the right adjustment of the same. Therefore, both as a representative of the Church and as a private individual, I support the Resolution, at all events with my opinion, and should be very willing, if it lay in my power, to further the action of this Association."

The pressmen stopped their shorthand scribbling as the Canon sat down, astonished at the applause produced by his speech. Everett Horne was delighted. It was just the calm, deliberate summing-up that was needed to give weight to an excited discussion, and he felt he had well judged his man in calling upon him to speak.

No sooner was the Canon seated than a little man on the other side of the platform sprang up and waited to be heard. He wore an ill-fitting, semi-clerical black coat, reaching far below his knees. He had on a very large white tie, tied in an awkward bow, his beard was long and straggling, and his hair parted in the middle and pressed down upon his head on either side. His left hand clutched the collar of his coat firmly, his right was stretched forth in studied gesture, the large fingers belonging to it wide apart. When silence was restored the Chairman stood up for a moment to announce:

"The Reverend Ezra Clutterbuck."

"Mr Chairman and dear friends," said the reverend gentleman in question, in a voice that was oily in the low notes and grating in the higher tones with which he finished each sentence, "I feel it my duty to express my admiration and thanks for the speech to which I have just listened. Coming as it does from a minister of the Establishment it has taken me by surprise. Especially when we remember that the Dean and his clergy have stubbornly refused"—("Order, order!")—"well, have kept aloof from the social welfare of the city—it is a source of pleasure to me to think that Canon Smith has so bravely helped us in the teeth of the indifference shown by the leaders of the Church to which he belongs. Gentlemen, I hope the Dean and other clergy of the Establishment in Frattenbury will take a lesson from the conduct of Canon Smith. I am proud to be on the same platform with him. I welcome him as a friend and brother."

If anything was wanted to crown the indignation of the Dean it was the reading of this speech in the local paper the next morning. His wrath against the worthy Canon knew no bounds, and he regarded his action as a personal affront to himself. He called upon Sir Daniel Taylor to consult him in the matter, and found the Mayor also furious over the report of the meeting.

"Really, Mr Dean," he said, "what with your

nephew and this firebrand Canon of yours, we are likely to find ourselves in a pretty mess."

"I know, I know. It is absolutely preposterous. I never heard of such a state of things. What is to be done?"

"Well—er—I hardly know. It is really extremely awkward. For the peace of the city it is *hardly* advisable to allow them to carry their threat to extremes and risk a Local Government enquiry."

"You think not?" asked the Dean.

"That is my private opinion," replied Sir Daniel.

"Of course it means a heavy expenditure on my part, but I am prepared to make sacrifices for the good of the community—if need be."

He spoke magnanimously.

"And you are of opinion, Sir Daniel, that the outcome of such an enquiry would necessitate expenditure on the part of the Chapter?"

The Dean knew very well that in order to put the property into repair certain nice little pickings would have to be sacrificed.

"My dear Mr Dean, in this age of Radical absolutism—for that is what it amounts to—it is sometimes wiser, and—ahem—cheaper—and at all events more graceful, to provide improvements to any property before one is compelled to do so. I fear this will be the case—strictly *entre nous*."

The Dean shook his head sadly.

"It is ridiculous, in my opinion," he said.

"I quite agree with you. But," he added as an after-thought, "one can always raise the rent when the value of the property is increased."

"Ah," replied the Dean thoughtfully, "true! That would only be common justice."

"At all events," went on Sir Daniel, "I shall have made up my mind as to what is the best course of action before the next Council meeting, and," he added pompously, "I think they will listen to me there and be guided by my advice. But this Canon Smith—he has, in my opinion, quite outstepped the bounds of propriety and gone outside his position."

"I know, I know," replied the Dean sorrowfully. "It is most annoying to me. You read that fellow Clutterbuck's speech?"

"I did."

"Canon Smith ought to feel downright humiliated. To be patronised by a Dissenter, and to listen to a flagrant attack on the Church! He ought to have had the good taste to have left the platform instantly."

"He ought never to have been there," said Sir Daniel.

"I perfectly agree with you."

"Can you not restrain him?"

"What can I do?"

"Surely, Mr Dean, you have some hold over your subordinates?"

The Dean looked uncomfortable. He pinched his

lower lip with his finger and thumb and tapped his glasses on the Mayor's table.

"Well—er—in confidence, Sir Daniel, I believe I *have*. But I hesitate to use it. Have you—er—heard any rumours of any kind about Canon Smith?"

Sir Daniel thought a moment.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "now you mention it, I remember overhearing some remark about him at Westhorpe's dinner the other night—some vague rumour."

"Exactly!" said the Dean; "but I think I may say that the rumour is perhaps hardly a vague one. The truth is," and he lowered his voice, "I have reasons for believing that Canon Smith, on a recent tour on the Continent, behaved in a manner quite out of place with the position of a clergyman. I would rather not give you the details—they were told me in confidence."

"Dear *me*!" said the Mayor, elevating his eyebrows, and with certain youthful reminiscences in his mind. "Was it in Paris?"

"No."

"Paris is a wicked city," rejoined Sir Daniel sententiously and virtuously; "I thought it might have been there."

"It was not there, but I am not at liberty to say more."

"Is he aware that you know of his—er—weaknesses?"

“ I think not.”

“ You are not absolutely certain ? ”

“ Not *absolutely*.”

Sir Daniel pondered for a few moments, then he said :

“ Of course, I quite understand that for the sake of the Church it is advisable not to make the scandal, if there is one, public—you yourself, Mr Dean, will admit the wisdom of the serpent in such a matter ; but, if I may presume to advise—— ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ I *think*, if I were you, I should feel justified in making use of my knowledge, privately and—er—only to him, if necessity obliged me. I mean, here is a man, setting—for so I consider it—authority at defiance, acting, in your Chapter meetings, in a revolutionary manner, interfering with the—ahem—law and order of the city, and stirring up strife in purely secular circles ; and, being a Church dignitary, he is a man whose opinions and actions carry weight and influence. The question is, how far will he go ? Now, it seems to me, if you have a hold upon him, it is quite consistent with your duty to check him in his foolishness.”

“ You—you advise me to threaten him, Sir Daniel ? ”

“ Er—not exactly that. But, in the event of any further trouble, you might hint to him—and in a purely friendly manner—that you possess information which might tend to damage his reputation ;

and—er—well, it might lead to an understanding between you. Don't you think so?"

The Dean rose from his seat and adjusted his glasses in silence. He saw the point very clearly, but, somehow, he did not feel inclined to talk it over further.

"I am very much obliged to you, Sir Daniel," he said, taking his leave; "and you will let me know what you intend to lay before the Council?"

"I will let you know—certainly, Mr Dean."

Meanwhile the Canon was blissfully ignorant of this Damocles' sword of rumour which was hanging over his devoted head. He knew, of course, that the line he had taken was not likely to meet with the approval of his fellows in the Close, but he was so thoroughly determined by this time that he was right, that he was content to face the disagreeable side of events. He regretted, naturally, the tone of the Dissenting minister's speech, but he felt that he, at all events, was not responsible for it.

As for folks knowing about the St Moritz incident, he had dismissed all thoughts of that. Certainly he did not feel exactly at his ease upon the occasion when he met with Eleanor Taylor, although he had perfectly persuaded himself that she had never recognised him.

More than once he found himself wondering about Jane Rutland's visit, and the curious question she had asked him; and the more he thought over it,

the more he felt convinced that it was for some reason connected with himself that she had come to see him. He found himself beginning to take an interest in the girl; her quiet, sympathetic manner attracted him, and he discovered several reasons for calling upon the Miss Millingtons.

The latter were in a state of unrest concerning the Canon. There were times when they almost felt that they ought to order James to say "Not at home" whenever he called. And yet, not one of them would have willingly missed seeing him.

If *only* they could definitely clear up the mystery with which that wretched letter had encircled him!

CHAPTER XII

ONE sometimes wonders whether the old Normans who laid the foundations of our great cathedrals—sparing neither time, expense, nor labour in the building of mighty pillars and solid arches—ever dreamed that the day would come when their work would be rattled off by an attendant verger to a small crowd anxiously pretending to know something of architecture, each of whom is duly confronted with a glaring notice stating that “Visitors are requested to put at least sixpence into this box.”

On second thoughts, however, one is sure that the old Norman builders did not so forecast the upward tendencies of the evolution of society; for if they had done so, surely they would have flung mallet and chisel and plumbet to the ground in disgust. For, somehow or other, it appears that they imagined they were erecting something to the glory of the Supreme Being, and were not giving the best of their craft in order that it might be said:

“This is generally considered to be the holdest portion of the ’ole hedderfice. This pillar measures

forty-two feet three hitches in circumference, and is hunequalled as a specimen of hearly Norman work. Pass hon, please ; there's another party waitin' to go round before Service."

When we erect a building nowadays to the glory of the Supreme Being, we generally employ an architect who has done something in town halls or other objects of utility. We limit his imagination, because imagination is often expensive, and then we invite tenders for the execution of his plans. The cheapest contract is signed, and up goes a structure of red and yellow brick, and the Bishop of the Diocese opens it with a sermon on worshipping God "in the beauty of holiness," and afterwards, at the public luncheon, expresses his gratitude to the local millionaire—who has previously done great things in pork, or shipping, or something—for so nobly heading the list of subscribers "with his munificent donation of five hundred pounds."

If the "hunequalled specimen of hearly Norman work" could go forth from the cathedral he helped to support and inspect these modern edifices, how would he exclaim !

At least there is one thing in which he would take comfort. He would say :

"Well, they will never be able to exhibit 'Visitors are expected to put at least sixpence into this box,' *there.*"

Frattenbury Cathedral was no exception to the

general rule. The nave was open to the public, the said public being requested by a notice on the door "not to walk about during Divine Service." This is a strange request to see in a Christian country where not many Buddhists or Mohammedans or other "heathens" are likely to visit cathedrals. It may be, however, that the Englishman has an ingrained notion that it is his privilege so to do. At all events, one may constantly see him exercising this privilege on the Continent, even if he is requested to keep it in abeyance at home.

Under this restriction, then, the nave of Frattenbury Cathedral was free. But across the entrance to each transept was an iron gate, barring the way to the beauties beyond, with a printed legend on one of the gates as thus—

"The Verger in attendance conducts Visitors round this portion of the Cathedral, except between the hours of One and Two."

From which it is to be inferred that the verger, like other men, indulged in a midday meal.

Immediately inside this gate stood a desk, with a book for the recording of visitors' names, together with a box and the notice about the sixpence.

It was just on the stroke of one, and the verger in attendance had hurried his party out of the iron gate and locked it, not without informing them that the Cathedral was closed altogether as soon as the clock struck. He then went round the nave, to clear

that particular part, and finally went out of the Cathedral altogether, locking the door and leaving the building empty.

He was a man of about five-and-thirty, with a pale, anxious-looking face and sunken dark eyes. He seemed, as he walked home with downcast head, to have something in his mind that was worrying him.

Five minutes after he had left the Cathedral the door opened again, and the Dean and Canon Smith entered, the former carrying his bunch of private keys.

"I think," he said, "we shall find the papers I spoke of in my vestry. It won't take us long to look through them, and you don't lunch till half-past one, I believe?"

"I'm quite at your service," replied the Canon.

The Dean had locked the door on the inside as he came into the Cathedral. He next, with another key, opened the iron gate leading into the transept, and mechanically closed and locked it when they had passed through.

He paused for a moment before the desk with the Visitors' Book, and glanced at the list of names.

"Quite a number of people have gone round this morning," he mused, "and a very large number last week. H'm, it's strange!"

"What is strange, Mr Dean?" asked Canon Smith.

"Well—er—to tell you the truth, I have been rather

troubled the last week or two. Mind, I mention this in strict confidence. The fact is, that although the number of visitors to the Cathedral has been greatly in excess of that of the same time last year, the amount collected in the box has fallen off to a very large extent."

"Ah," replied the Canon, "no doubt many of the visitors shirk their little responsibility in spite of the notice."

"I have begun to think it is not exactly *that*," said the Dean mysteriously.

"Why?—I don't quite understand."

"I haven't the key of the box in my pocket at this moment, but if I had, I should feel strongly inclined to count the money now."

"And compare it with the number of visitors?"

"No. I should rather compare it with the amount I found in it, say, this evening. And," he went on more mysteriously than ever, "I should not be surprised if I found *less* than I should now."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Canon, "surely you don't suspect some one of stealing it?"

"I'm afraid I do," replied the Dean.

"Who?"

"Well," said the Dean, as they walked across the transept to the vestry, "of course it is only a suspicion, but Blake is the person who has best means of access to the box."

"Really," replied Canon Smith, "I should be very

sorry to suspect one of the vergers, and I trust your surmises are not correct. Have you said anything to him?"

"No," said the Dean; "I do not think it would be wise to do that. But it has occurred to me that one might make enquiries about him, or even watch him, or take some steps to ascertain whether he tampers with the box."

The Canon reddened slightly. The idea was repulsive to him, and, somehow, he found it go against his innate sense of justice.

"Oh," he said, "I don't think I should do that, if I were you. It seems so very like playing the part of a detective. Why not tell him that there is a falling off in the money? It seems only fair to give him a warning."

"Thank you," retorted the Dean with ill-concealed asperity; "that may be your opinion, but I am at liberty to possess one of my own. Here are the papers we came to see."

The Canon looked at him sharply and in some surprise. It was the first time the Dean had lost his temper in his presence and betrayed his dislike of him. Not another word was said on the subject of the money, and they spent some minutes in going over some business matters connected with the Chapter.

The Dean's vestry, in which they were standing together, looked out on the transept, and the door

stood open. It was on the side directly opposite the Visitors' Book and offertory box. Suddenly the Dean laid a hand on his companion's shoulder.

"Listen!" he said; "what was that?"

Some one was opening the outer door of the Cathedral, and steps were heard immediately afterwards.

"Strange!" said the Dean; "I know I locked it."

The next moment they heard the clang of the iron gate, and saw Blake, the verger, come into the transept.

They were standing side by side at the open door of the vestry, the Dean with his hand still on his companion's shoulder. Blake did not even glance in their direction, feeling sure there was no one but himself in the Cathedral.

"S—sh!" whispered the Dean very softly, and gripping the other's arm more firmly. Again Canon Smith felt himself reddening with the overwhelming sense that he was acting the spy. Blake drew what apparently was a key from his pocket.

Then the Canon took out his handkerchief and blew his nose vehemently. He felt the Dean almost shake him in anger, and he heard him give vent to an angry exclamation.

The next moment Blake was fumbling at the visitors' desk, and the Dean was striding rapidly across the transept.

"What are you doing here, Blake?"

"I left my spectacles on the desk, sir," replied Blake, looking extremely uncomfortable, "and came back here to get them."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Dean, who was almost speechless with rage, "is *that* what you came for?"

"Yes, sir," said the man, recovering his composure the more the Dean fumed. "Shall I lock the door when I go out, sir?"

Half-a-dozen different sentences flashed across the Dean's mind, but he gave vent to none of them. He saw that the Canon had purposely destroyed all vestige of the proof he wanted at one blow—of his nose. Finally he contented himself with administering a sharp rebuke.

"You have no business in the Cathedral at this hour, as you know very well. Lock the door when you go, and don't let this occur again."

"No, sir," replied the man, "but I didn't think there was any harm in fetching my spectacles. I can't read without them. Very sorry, sir, I'm sure."

He had entirely recovered himself now, and walked away quite calmly. He saw there was no possible proof of his crime. But he wondered, as he went, why the Canon blew his nose. He knew it was the Canon, because he had turned and seen him.

Meanwhile the Dean strode back across the transept, his tall gaunt form drawn up to its full height, his lips white with anger. The Canon stood

at the vestry door, waiting to receive the storm which he felt was about to burst.

"I must say I think it was a most uncalled-for action on your part to give Blake warning that we were here," began the Dean; "I observed that you did it purposely."

"Yes," retorted the Canon, who felt quite on his mettle, "I certainly did it purposely, as you say."

"And may I ask why?" enquired the Dean, pale with anger.

"Because I have a distinct objection to being a spy. I consider it would have been more in accord with one's office to have taken an open and kindly line, and so to have given the man a chance of retrieving his character before it was too late."

"You presume to dictate to *me*!"

"That is my fixed opinion."

"I shall bring the matter before the Chapter. The whole thing was most palpable, and had you not interfered, we should have been eye-witnesses of the crime."

"That is just what I preferred not to be," retorted the Canon; "nor do I think it at all necessary to trouble the Chapter about it. I have every confidence that whatever Blake may have done it is not likely to be repeated. He has had a salutary warning, perhaps, and that is enough."

"It is *not* enough," cried the Dean. "Blake must be dismissed, and the Chapter shall do it."

"There is no evidence against him, and I shall object to any such action."

"You—you will object, will you?" retorted the Dean, who was losing his dignity.

"Most certainly. Dismissal without proof would be unjust."

"Then I may as well tell you, Canon Smith, that I am beginning to tire of your — your insubordination."

"Indeed!" replied the Canon, drawing himself up. "Please to recollect that I have every right to do and say what I please with regard to the Chapter, and that although you, as Dean, are the president of the body, you have only an equal voting power with the rest of us. The question of subordination is entirely beside the mark."

"Pray let me tell you," said the Dean, whose anger had now reached its highest pitch, "that I consider your conduct ever since your coming to Frattenbury to be most obnoxious—*most* obnoxious. You know very well to what I refer, and I will add, for your own sake, that I warn you against going any further in your defiance of my wishes and authority."

"What do you mean?" asked the astonished Canon.

"I would fain avoid a public scandal, but it may be as well for you to know that I am in possession of certain knowledge about you that, if publicly known, would seriously affect your reputation."

"I am at a loss to comprehend you, Mr Dean."

"I refer," said the latter slowly and venomously, "to your extraordinary behaviour abroad in the early part of this year. The facts have been laid before me."

For a moment or two Canon Smith held his breath, as what he thought was the truth flashed across him. Then he faced the position bravely and calmly. It was unfortunate. He would rather it had never leaked out, but, as it was, he was certainly not going to put up with threats.

"Whatever I may have done abroad," he said quietly, "is my own affair."

"You don't deny it, then?" cried the Dean.

"I have no desire to deny anything. I have a perfect right to act as I think proper."

"Your conduct was disgraceful!"

"I beg to differ. I have done nothing of which I am ashamed."

"I regret you have the effrontery to say so."

"It may possibly, to a man of your views, appear strange, but——"

"Strange? Scandalous!—a disgrace to the cloth you wear!"

A fleeting vision of the check suit flashed before the Canon's mind, and brought a vestige of a smile to his lips as he replied:

"Not at all. Very many clergymen are in the habit of doing exactly what I did when on the

Continent. It is a common practice—as you must know.”

A vision of Monte Carlo gaming-tables, and Canon Smith imbibing tumblers of champagne, was in the Dean's mind, and he was more horror-struck than ever.

“You appear to be utterly devoid of any sense of shame,” he said frigidly. “I can only say that I consider your conduct undignified and scandalous, and that only a strong sense of the evil that would accrue to the Church—particularly in this city—has prevented me from consulting the Bishop and begging him to institute a formal enquiry. As it is, I have warned you, and I am not prepared to say that I shall stop there.”

The Canon actually laughed!

“You may tell the Bishop whatever you please,” he replied, “and I really haven't the slightest objection to any one knowing all my movements abroad. I am certainly not going to be withheld from performing my duty by any threats on your part; and if you attempt to coerce the Chapter to dismiss Blake, I shall oppose you strongly. And now, as my lunch is a hot one, I think I will ask you to kindly produce your keys and allow me to go home to it.”

The Dean and the Canon walked back to their respective residences by different routes. The former was greatly disturbed in mind, divided between anger at the Canon's defiance, and horror at what he rather

naturally considered his utter lack of the moral sense. During the seven years he had been Dean of Frattentbury he had never been more deeply annoyed and shocked. The Bishop was away on a well-earned holiday of a month, or he would probably have called and laid the case before him that afternoon. So he took counsel with his wife—as he would have done in any case—and she advised him to keep matters to himself for the present.

“The brazen-faced man!” she exclaimed, jerking her head forward; “I never heard of such a thing in my life. But he shan’t come to the Deanery. And he shan’t take me into dinner again at the Archdeacon’s, or anywhere else—and I won’t even shake hands with him! It would be contaminating.”

As for the Canon, he pondered over matters while eating his lonely lunch. He was justly indignant with the Dean, and it would not be true to say that he was not a little put out. He was perfectly aware, in thinking things over, that the St Moritz escapade was, after all, only a trivial matter, and that he had not done the slightest harm; but he had hoped that it would never have come out, and he had been at ease on this score ever since Eleanor Taylor had met him without recognising him.

When he thought about Eleanor Taylor he felt rather foolish. If the Dean carried out his threat and made the affair public, how would he pose in her eyes? He could not say that he had not recognised her, and

she would look upon him as having been ashamed of himself. So he had been, at the time, but now he was beginning to see that it would have been the wisest policy to have referred to their previous meeting naturally. The mistake he had made was the running away from St Moritz ; that was evident.

A sudden thought struck him. Perhaps Eleanor Taylor had recognised him since that meeting at the Miss Millingtons and had talked about it. That was a very possible solution of the Dean's knowledge. He felt more uncomfortable still as he dwelt upon this aspect of affairs. Nevertheless, he was on his mettle, and determined to take an honest stand whatever might happen. Finally, by an effort of will he dismissed the subject, and sat down to write the next chapter of his book.

Evensong at the Cathedral was at four o'clock. The dignitaries always robed in their own houses and walked to the Cathedral, each preceded by a verger carrying his silver wand of office. At a quarter to four the Canon's verger rang the bell and entered the hall to wait.

The Canon put on his cassock, surplice, hood, and scarf, which were hanging on a peg in the study, took his college cap in his hand and entered the hall. The particular verger in attendance upon him was Blake. Usually that functionary opened the door in silence and stalked solemnly out before the Canon. To-day he hesitated.

"Beg pardon, sir," he began.

"Well, Blake, what is it?"

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," said the man, looking down at his boots.

"What for?" asked the Canon.

"I think you know, sir," said the verger in a low tone.

The Canon was equal to the occasion.

"Have you anything to give me?" he said very quietly, holding out his hand—"anything for which you feel you have no further use?"

Blake turned very white, and slowly put his hand in his pocket.

"I never want to see it again, sir," he said huskily, as he gave the Canon a small key. "God bless you, sir!—God bless you!"

"Go on, please," said the Canon sharply, "or we shall be late."

Then Blake opened the door. Up went the silver wand at an acute angle, the Canon put on his cap, and they started on their solemn little walk to the Cathedral.

Service over, the Canon went for a long walk in the country. Northward of Frattenbury was a chain of downs, and thither he wended his way. A pathway up the hill led him through a small wood of pines and larches, and a turn in the path suddenly brought him face to face with Everett Horne and Eleanor Taylor, who were walking arm-in-arm. He was

astonished to meet them thus, but they greeted him with perfect equanimity.

"What a lovely evening!" said Eleanor.

"Isn't it? And this is a charming walk."

"Makes you almost want to be a kid again and gather bluebells, eh?" said Everett, striking at a bunch of those flowers with his stick.

A few words of general conversation passed, and then Eleanor said:

"I always love these woods."

"They remind me," replied the Canon, with a desperate effort, and looking straight at her, "they remind me of the Unter Alpina walk—in the Engadine."

"Oh, you have been at St Moritz, have you, Canon Smith?" replied Eleanor, looking at him without a ruffle, while Everett turned his head away and studied the bluebells earnestly. "Yes, as you say, there *is* a resemblance—only I have been there in the winter, and the larches were bare then. Charming place, isn't it?"

"Very," replied the Canon, retreating because there was no counter-attack. "Well—you are going back to Frattenbury, I suppose? I mean to walk on to Sefton and take the train home."

"We won't keep you, then. Good-bye."

"Didn't I dissemble splendidly, Everett?" asked Eleanor, three minutes later; "he was so nearly putting his foot in it."

"Close shave. I didn't dare look at him. Whatever made him give vent to such a remark?"

"Mere nervousness, dear," replied Eleanor. "It was the very subject he wanted most to avoid. I remember once dining with Jews, and for the life of me I couldn't help mentioning money-lenders."

"It was neat of you making him think that you were under the impression he had been at St Moritz in the summer."

"Wasn't it? Poor Canon Smith! He's terribly afraid I shall remember him!"

And Canon Smith was saying to himself as he walked on:

"That settles it, then. She *hasn't* recognised me. Well, evidently the Dean didn't get his information there. It is strange. But if it all comes out *what* am I to say to her? It's very awkward."

"Dear me!" he went on, "those two appear to have a very close understanding. I wonder what Sir Daniel thinks of it!"

CHAPTER XIII

SOME seven miles from Frattenbury, as the crow flies, is the little seaside town of Selgate, but in order to reach it by rail a somewhat devious route *via* Foxby Junction is necessary. A day or two after his stormy interview with the Dean, Canon Smith found himself at Frattenbury Station, taking a ticket to Selgate, where he had been invited to lunch with an old friend who was spending a week or two there.

On the platform was Jane Rutland, studying the illustrated papers on the bookstall. Presently she turned and found herself face to face with the Canon. A word or two of greeting passed between them, and then the train came in.

"Let me find you a carriage," said the Canon, seeing she was about to travel; "what class?"

"Oh, third. Thank you very much."

He pocketed the blue ticket he was holding in his hand, lest its colour should betray a superior class, opened the door of a third-class compartment, and followed her in.

"Are you going far?"

"Only to Selgate, though it takes quite a long

time to get there by this train. One has almost half an hour to wait at Foxby."

"I'm going to Selgate, myself," he replied genially; "it's my first visit there, and I'm quite looking forward to a breath of sea air. You know I'm quite a stranger to this part of the country."

"It's a very pretty part, isn't it?" she said, glancing out of the window at the downs in the near distance. "I haven't lived at Frattenbury long, you know, but I've grown very fond of the surrounding country."

"Where did you live before you came here?"

"At Maplestone—till my father's death last year."

"Dear me!" replied the Canon, with a sudden burst of interest, "I have thought several times your name was somehow familiar to me. Surely it must have been your father, then, who was Professor of History at Maplestone College?"

"Yes; he was there for a great many years."

"It ought to have struck me before. I can't say I knew your father very well—in fact, I only met him once—but I had a good deal of correspondence with him from time to time, and he helped me very materially when I was writing an historical book."

"The 'Frankfort Controversies,' I believe," she said with a smile.

"Ah, I see you remember."

"Oh yes, I remember quite well. You see, I really had quite an interest in your book, Canon

Smith. I used to write at my father's dictation. I hope my handwriting was clear enough for you to follow."

"Now, how very interesting!" he said; "I have several of those letters still. I must really thank you very much for your share in the work, but I'm afraid you must have found some of it very dry."

"Oh, not at all. I was quite brought up in an atmosphere of history, you know, and I've read 'Frankfort Controversies.' My father had a very high opinion of it."

The Canon smiled with pardonable pride.

"It was very kind of him to think so, for he was an exceedingly able man. Ah! now I recollect that on the one occasion on which I met him he told me what a help you were to him. And he mentioned, by the way, that you had just published something yourself."

She blushed slightly.

"He shouldn't have told you that. It was only a little thing I wrote, and quite anonymously."

"May I ask what it was?"

"Oh yes. It was called 'A Story of Old Sussex'—just a child's book."

"Now, do you know, I came across that book not very long since, and wondered who wrote it. I think it's a capital little work. It shows much historical knowledge and is accurate. I'm very pleased to have met the authoress and to tell her so."

When the train stopped and the porters cried out, "Foxby!—change for Selgate!" they were engaged in quite an animated discussion concerning St Wilfrith and his work in the South. They had to wait some little time on the platform for the Selgate train. Presently Jane Rutland changed the conversation abruptly.

"I'm very glad I met you this morning," she said, "for I really wanted to talk to you about something."

Their last interview flashed across his mind, and he wondered whether she was going to explain her curious question about Mentone.

"Yes?" he said.

"It's about a man named Blake—you know him."

"One of the vergers?"

"Yes."

"Indeed!" replied the Canon uneasily, wondering what was coming. "You want to speak to me about Blake? Well?"

"In the first place, I assure you he hasn't the slightest idea that I intended doing so. In fact, I don't know him myself. But his wife is a dress-maker and occasionally does some work for me. That is how I heard about his trouble."

They were sitting side by side on a seat on the platform. The Canon turned to her and said with anxiety:

"Now I hope you're not going to tell me there is anything wrong about Blake? In fact, for certain

reasons of my own, I would rather you did *not* tell me anything of the kind."

She looked back at him frankly.

"Oh no," she said, "he's not done anything wrong ; but he's in trouble, and I wanted to ask whether you could help him."

He gave a sigh of relief.

"Go on," he replied—"though I don't know, of course, how I can be of any use to him."

"The reason I determined to ask you," she said quietly, "was because I know he looks upon you as a friend."

"Oh, not at all," he answered, looking down on the platform.

"Mrs Blake told me that her husband had said that you have acted towards him with great kindness, though he would not tell her in what way ; so I thought you would be the one to ask, as you might bring his case before the Chapter."

The Canon smiled grimly as he remembered that Blake's case was likely to be brought before the Chapter as it was.

"My dear Miss Rutland," he replied, "I don't know what it is you want me to bring before the Chapter, but I fear my influence in that direction is very feeble."

"At all events," she said quickly, "I have heard that that august body does not inspire you with much fear when it is a question of justice. This

is a question of philanthropy, and might be even easier."

"Well, let me hear it."

"In plain words, Blake is in financial difficulties. He backed a bill—isn't that the correct term?—for a brother of his, and now he has to find all the money. If this is not done by Saturday, an action will be taken and all his goods seized—and that would ruin his home."

"Indeed!" replied the Canon. "I'm very sorry to hear about it. Is the amount considerable?"

He was beginning to understand the source of Blake's temptation now.

"I don't know what the whole amount is, but he wants twenty pounds more—Mrs Blake told me so yesterday."

She did not add that a slightly larger sum had been required the previous day, and that her own slender purse was proportionately lighter.

"I see," he said reflectively.

"It struck me that you could possibly prevail upon the Dean to advance him the twenty pounds from the Chapter, and deduct a weekly sum out of his wages."

The Canon smiled his grim smile again before he replied.

"I am very sorry for him—very sorry."

"I knew you would be. And his wife is a struggling, hard-working woman."

"Where do they live?" he asked casually.

"Number Eleven, Palmer's Alley — I think *you* know that part of Frattenbury," she added with a slight emphasis.

"Yes," he said with a laugh, "I have some reason for knowing it. Well, I'm very glad you told me this, and I'll see what can be done in the matter."

"Thank you so much. It's very kind of you, and I hope you'll succeed. Here is the Selgate train, I think."

They took tickets at Foxby, and then for the first time Jane Rutland noticed that the Canon's was of a superior colour.

"I'm afraid you have been sacrificing your comfort for my sake," she said.

"On the contrary, it has been a great pleasure to travel with you."

She saw that he honestly meant it, too, and was genuinely pleased herself. They said good-bye at Selgate.

"We must have another historical chat," remarked the Canon.

"You are writing another book, are you not?"

"Yes. I was in Switzerland early in the year, collecting notes for it."

"I see. Well, I wish you well over it. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Now I wonder," said Jane Rutland to herself as she walked away, "I wonder whether his visit

to Switzerland has any reference to the rumours about him. Aunt Bella let out that his card was discovered at Mentone. I'm perfectly certain *he* has never been there. He may have exchanged cards with some other clergyman abroad!"

From which it will be seen that Jane Rutland was an astute young woman, and had not only very nearly hit upon the truth, but had done what is as wise as it is rare: she had brought inductive reasoning to bear upon the growth of a scandal.

When the Canon was alone in his residence at Frattenbury that evening, he turned over in his mind the possible ways by which he might try to get Blake out of his difficulties. But the more he thought things over, the more he saw that it would be out of the question to bring the matter before the Dean and Chapter. In the first place, the Chapter did not meet until the following week. In the next place, he felt pretty certain that the Dean was going to carry out his threat with regard to Blake, and that it would be all that he could do to prevent the man being dismissed.

Blake must have the twenty pounds, though. That was certain. He looked on Blake, not as the "Sandy Saint" would have regarded him, as "a soul to be saved," but as a soul that *had* been saved, and that, not by the traditions of orthodoxy, but by the blowing of a nose. Finally he said to himself:

"Blake shall have the twenty pounds."

There were three reasons that forced this conclusion to his mind.

First, he had, a couple of days before, received a nice little royalty from his publishers.

Secondly, his genuine human sympathy with the man.

Thirdly, Jane Rutland had charged him with the case.

And these three reasons were strictly in the ascending scale.

Finally he opened a drawer in his study table, took out a tin cash-box, opened it, and produced his cheque-book.

Then he hesitated.

"No," he remarked slowly, "not that way; I will remain anonymous."

He looked inside the cash-box.

A five-pound note and three odd sovereigns.

"I shall have to get the money at the Bank to-morrow," he muttered. "Ah!"

His eyes fell upon something at the bottom of the box. He took it out. It was the twenty-pound note he had found in the pocket of the Thusis stranger. All this time he had kept it, together with the check suit, in the hope that an opportunity might some day occur of restoring them to the man—with the addition of a strong piece of his mind.

"Why not this!" he exclaimed; "there is no reason why I should give him back his own particular note. Here is the money handy, and Blake would get it by the first post to-morrow."

Being a man of habit, he jotted down the number of the note on a bit of paper, put the twenty pounds into an envelope, with the words, "From a friend," written on the flap, addressed the envelope to Blake, and took it to the post at once, so that not even his servant should know he had sent the verger anything.

Then he returned, spent a couple of hours over his book, writing hard, and went to bed in a happy frame of mind and with an easy conscience.

CHAPTER XIV

SIR DANIEL TAYLOR sat in the Mayor's chair in the Council Chamber, the Royal Arms emblazoned on a panel behind him. In front of him was a long table, covered with green baize, whereat were assembled the sapient members of the Frattenbury Town Council, all looking exceedingly important as became City Fathers. At the further end of the room, facing the Mayor, was a gallery, where a sprinkling of citizens was occasionally present to listen to the wisdom arising from the table below.

On this particular evening the gallery was crowded, while, foremost of the throng, in the front row, sat Everett Horne, supported by Rice on one side and Canon Smith on the other. During the preliminaries of the meeting the Mayor glared at each of the three in turn, for he knew exactly why they were present. The tobacconist he abominated, as became a Tory and a Churchman; the Canon he regarded with pained contempt, as became a respectable and virtuous man; and Everett Horne excited in him

mixed feelings of fear, anger, and disappointment, as became a defeated man and a father.

Presently the crucial business of the meeting commenced. The Committee appointed for sanitary purposes presented their report, in the course of which was the following:—

“The City Surveyor has reported, according to instructions, on the sanitary condition of that portion of the city known as Grove Street and Palmer’s Alley. He is of opinion that steps should be taken for a proper water-supply to each house, that the drainage of the same should be entirely renewed, and that a number of alterations and improvements, specified in the separate report before you, entailing sundry building operations externally and internally, should be ordered without delay, in order that the whole property should be brought up to a higher standard and more in accord with other similarly situated portions of the City. The Committee have carefully considered this report, and recommend that it should be carried out in detail at once.”

If they had dared, the citizens in the gallery would have applauded; but they knew very well in that case the Mayor would have ordered them out instantly.

“We’ve won, hands down,” whispered Everett Horne to the Canon. “The Mayor’s the chairman of that committee, and he’s caved in.”

The City Surveyor, who sat down below, had

turned very red. He knew very well that this report of his ought to have been adopted ages ago.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Mayor pompously, and very anxious to avoid any discussion, "you have heard the report of the Sanitary Committee. Will any one move that it be adopted?"

He looked significantly at one of the Aldermen, with whom he had made arrangements beforehand, but before that individual could rise to his feet a Councillor had anticipated him—a little red-haired fellow, who was about the only man present who was not afraid to speak his mind in Sir Daniel's presence, and who had always been a thorn in the latter's side.

"Mr Mayor, sir!"

"Well?" said that functionary.

"Before the adoption of that report is moved I should like to ask a question."

"What is it?"

"I am not a member of the Sanitary Committee, and I want to know whether this report has been drawn up under compulsion."

"Order! order!" cried the Mayor and several of his attendant satellites.

"Because," went on the irrepressible little man, before he could be checked, "it is a strange coincidence that this report should come before us immediately after the resolution of the late meeting

of the Ratepayers' Association ; and I, for one, think we are more indebted to those gentlemen I see in the gallery for this very necessary action which the Committee recommend us to take than to the Committee itself."

"Order! order!" shouted the Mayor. "Your remarks are most uncalled-for, sir! The Committee over which it is my honour and privilege to preside, are not to be coerced either to or from their duty to this city by any outside influence."

"Oh!" cried the red-haired man ironically, rousing still further the Mayor's anger.

"The matter has been before the consideration of the Committee for some time," went on Sir Daniel, "and I should like to take this opportunity of saying, for the benefit of certain persons present who may or may not have exceeded their lawful functions in this city"—and he glared at Canon Smith—"by undue interference and threats, that the deliberations of this City Council and its committees owe nothing to any action on their part. I myself, perhaps, am likely, as a private citizen, to most feel the burden that the acceptance of the report will entail, but I have always determined that my feelings as a private citizen shall never retard the course of justice."

Here the Canon and Everett Horne broke out into a broad smile at the Mayor's rather unfortunate remark ; but the speaker was in blissful ignorance

of the strange trend of his "feelings as a private citizen," and exclaimed angrily :

"I may even be exposed to the taunts and jeers of those who ought to know better, but I repeat that my public duty has nothing to do with my private feelings, and that, as chairman of the Sanitary Committee, I have been forward in drawing up this report, though it can scarcely be an advantage to me to do so. I will now call upon Alderman Gifford, who, I believe, was about to speak."

"The enemy beat a retreat, covered with much confusion, and reported a moral victory," whispered Everett Horne.

Alderman Gifford, a local corn merchant, whose ledgers had Sir Daniel's name in them as a buyer of much barley, made a pretty little speech, extolling, in half a score of adjectives, the Mayor's public-spirited attitude, and moved the adoption of the report. This was seconded in an equally pleasing speech by a Councillor, and finally carried unanimously. Then the gallery began to clear, and Everett Horne walked home with the Canon.

Everett Horne went in with the Canon and stayed till late, smoking and chatting. He was much pleased with the victory, and he thanked Canon Smith very heartily for his share in winning it.

"I'm afraid, though," he said, "you have made your position here rather a disagreeable one, both with Sir Daniel and my respected uncle."

"I don't mind that," replied the Canon. "I tell you candidly that I might not have taken the line I have done a few months ago, but I have, perhaps, broadened a little in my views of late."

"Oh," replied Horne thoughtfully, "that is not always the effect of living in the Close, and I'm glad to hear you say as much. Yes, we've both of us got ourselves a little bit disliked. Did you notice how the Mayor glared at us?"

"I did," said the Canon. Then he added drily: "You don't seem to mind it much."

Everett Horne took his pipe from his lips and puffed out a cloud slowly. Then he smiled, as he looked at the Canon.

"You mean, considering I am hoping to be his son-in-law some day?"

"Well, yes!"

"Oh, I think that will come right, you know. Miss Taylor is of age, and the old man's a bit of a snob. I *am* a fishmonger, and a Radical, and all that, but somehow I think he'll forgive it all. Funny mind he must have, eh?"

"I fancy," said the Canon, "that Miss Taylor herself must be a little trying to him sometimes."

"Yes. Quite a socialist, isn't she?"

"Quite."

Everett Horne was looking at him with an amused air. Eleanor had told him of the conversation and arguments up at St Moritz, and he felt pretty certain

that most of the Canon's line of action was really based upon his experiences there. He was trying to picture him in the loud check knickerbocker suit or in the sweater with the Cheshire Cat emblazoned upon it.

Just at that moment the front-door bell rang, and presently a servant entered.

"The Dean wishes to speak to you particularly, sir."

"Show him in, please."

"Oh my prophetic soul, my uncle!" exclaimed Everett Horne; "I'd better go. Good evening, Uncle," he went on, as the Dean entered; "don't mind me, I'm just off."

The Dean shook hands with both men. He looked taller and thinner than ever, his eyes shone, and his cheeks, usually so sallow, were quite glowing. He had come into the room with an air of triumph and importance which made itself felt.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," he said pompously, protesting, with a slight cough, against the fumes of "Southern Mixture," and eyeing with a look of disapproval the whisky decanter from which Everett had been helping himself, "I'm sorry to disturb you, Canon Smith, but the matter is important—though I guessed that my nephew might be here."

"Quite right, Uncle," said Everett cheerfully; "we've been congratulating ourselves over the Town

Council meeting. I suppose you've heard of it? You'll have to get to work, Uncle!—you'll have to get to work!"

"I disapprove of your methods, Everett," replied the Dean coldly, "and I have no wish to discuss what has taken place. Sir Daniel Taylor is quite capable of advising those under him, and I consider the attack upon him has been most unjustifiable."

This was intended as a double-barrelled rebuke. In reply, Everett drank up his whisky-and-water, genially nodding towards the Dean.

"Your good health, Uncle. Good-night. Good-night, Canon Smith; don't trouble, I'll let myself out."

"Now!" exclaimed the Dean in ill-disguised triumph, when his nephew had departed, and standing with his back to the fire in a commanding attitude, "Now, Canon Smith! I have come to tell you that my suspicions about Blake were not only correct, but events have proved that the man is a thorough scoundrel. I thought it only right, as you have chosen to defend him by what I consider to be extraordinary conduct, that you should know at once."

"Indeed!" replied the Canon rather coldly. "I was under the impression that you intended bringing the case before the Chapter. Till then, I see no necessity for discussing it."

"Oh yes, there is," replied the Dean, who was

much too jubilant to lose his temper; "and I think, when you have heard what I have to tell you, that you will admit the error of defending him."

It was the man's petty mind that had brought him out on his errand. He wanted to triumph over this insubordinate Canon.

"I quite admit," replied the latter, "that Blake may have transgressed; I never disputed that for a moment. What I objected to was acting the part of a spy, and your refusing to give him a chance. I did not want the man to be ruined while there was a chance of saving him. And I do not hesitate to say that I think we shall have no further cause of complaint. In fact, I am almost prepared to guarantee his honesty for the future."

"I don't think you will be so prepared in a minute!" retorted the Dean, not losing his temper because he felt he could afford to keep it. "Of course I understand that your defence of Blake is only a part of your determined opposition to myself——"

"Not at all," said the Canon sharply.

The Dean waved his hand.

"I may be allowed to have my own opinion of that! But, to come to the point at once, Blake is in the police cells!"

"What!" exclaimed the Canon indignantly; "you have given him in charge?"

"No," said the Dean blandly; "this is another

matter. He was arrested in the early part of the evening on a very grave accusation."

"What?"

"Do you remember the Bank robbery at Worthingham just about Christmas?"

"Yes. I heard something about it at the time."

"Well, one of the stolen notes—a note for twenty pounds—was found in Blake's possession to-day. He was trying to pass it. And he is unable to give any account of how it got into his hands. The man is evidently in league with thieves, besides being one himself. He is a receiver of stolen goods. There will be no need for *us* to prosecute him."

The Canon sat for a moment or two stunned with the intelligence. Then he said slowly:

"A twenty - pound note! Is this true, Mr Dean?"

"Quite true!" replied the Dean triumphantly; "I have seen the superintendent of the police this evening. He tells me a Scotland Yard Inspector will be here to-morrow, together with the representative of the Bank Managers. The police have been trying to trace the notes for several months."

A flood of light broke in upon the Canon's mind, carrying him back to that particular evening when he dined with the stranger in the hotel at Thusis.

"And you say Blake is in prison?" he asked.

"He is."

The Canon glanced at the clock.

"Is it possible to bail him out to-night?" he asked quietly.

"To bail him out!" cried the Dean in astonishment. "I quite fail to see the drift of such a question."

"Because," said the Canon, still quietly, "I would do so myself, if it were possible."

"Bail is very properly refused," answered the Dean. "Really, your partisanship with this man Blake is most extraordinary!"

"You see," replied the Canon, crossing one leg over the other, and putting the tips of his fingers together, "I happen to know that he is quite innocent of this charge."

The Dean looked at him with increased astonishment.

"Perhaps you will explain?" he said, his temper beginning to go for the first time.

Canon Smith thought a moment before he answered. After the way the Dean had treated him he was not at all disposed to be confidential.

"I think," he said presently, "that I would rather do that before the magistrates. There has, I presume, already been some little public talk about the affair, so it will be just as well to establish Blake's innocence in public. When will the magistrates sit?"

"There is to be a special sitting to-morrow morning," replied the Dean, his curiosity strongly aroused. "But what can *you* know about this affair?"

"I have already said that I will explain that—to-morrow."

"I think," said the Dean, "that you owe it to me to explain it now."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, but I prefer to wait till to-morrow. I will go so far as to say that the question is one which only concerns Blake and myself. And now," he went on, rising from his seat and speaking with some asperity, "I think, if you will excuse me, I will just run round to Mrs Blake and tell her it will be all right. She must be worrying herself dreadfully."

The hint was a broad one, and the Dean, baffled at every point, went home to discuss matters with his wife.

"Octavia," he said, "I have made up my mind that as soon as the Bishop returns it will be my duty to tell him everything about Canon Smith."

"Quite right, quite right. The man is becoming a downright nuisance. He isn't fit for his position here. I shouldn't wonder if his Letters of Orders were frauds. He ought to be exposed. Terrible!—terrible! What does he know about this Blake? I don't believe he knows anything; he's doing it to annoy you. It's time he was stopped—a regular red-hot Socialist! Most dangerous! Ring the bell, dear; it is past ten."

The Dean rang the bell. The servants filed in. The Dean read prayers, very solemnly. The page-

boy happened to be munching a piece of stickjaw, and found it difficult to join in the responses, for which omission the gentle Octavia kept him behind and lectured him. The Dean retired to his study for an hour's reading. Silence reigned in the Close—hallowed silence.

And in that silence the three Miss Millingtons were wondering, as they did nightly, whether anything was *really* wrong with the Canon. The Dean had laid his book on his knees, and was thinking of what course the Bishop might take with the said Canon. Jane Rutland was looking over the "Frankfort Controversies," before blowing out her candle, and wondering, at intervals, what the aforesaid Canon, in his heart of hearts, thought of the little book called "A Story of Old Sussex."

And the Canon in Residence himself? He was smoking his last pipe and thinking over many things—the stranger at Thusis—the check suit—St Moritz and Eleanor Taylor—his own development in human interests—the mysterious twenty-pound note—what he was going to say on the morrow—the unfortunate *dénouement* of Jane Rutland's sympathy—Jane Rutland herself.

Then he went to bed thinking—of Jane Rutland.

CHAPTER XV

SIR DANIEL TAYLOR took his seat on the judicial bench with a conscious sense of his own importance as Chief Magistrate of the Cathedral City of Frattenbury. He was flanked by two other *confrères*, sharing his air of importance. He looked down below him at the various functionaries, who rose on the entry of the Triumvirate. There was the Clerk to the Justices, most indispensable to the Great Unpaid ; a couple of reporters, with their note-books all ready to record wisdom ; a strange solicitor, representing the Worthingham Bank ; a detective-inspector from Scotland Yard ; the local superintendent of police and half-a-dozen of his satellites — sturdy, stolid, stomach-developing ; the local bank manager, who had detected the stolen note, and, to the Mayor's surprise and slight annoyance, the familiar figure of the Canon in Residence, calmly taking a seat in the court.

At the back was a crowded audience, for already Blake's arrest and its connection with the great Worthingham Bank robbery had caused considerable

excitement in the city. The Mayor's eyes lighted upon the little sea of faces with equanimity. He loved to exercise his judicial functions in public, and was never ill-pleased when there was such an occasion for the display of his powers and sagacity.

"Bring in the prisoner, please!" he ordered, throwing himself back in his chair and half closing his eyes in token of the supreme tranquillity of Justice.

"Frederick Blake!" shouted the usher.

A couple of constables brought in the unfortunate prisoner, placed him in a wooden compartment not unlike an old-fashioned pew, and stood on each side of the dock as sentries, with a look that said:

"Go on; he'll never escape while *we're* here. We know our duty."

Blake, who looked very uncomfortable, glanced round the court. His eye fell for a moment upon the Canon, who smiled and nodded to him encouragingly. He wondered what this meant.

The Clerk then read the indictment with some emphasis, instead of in his usual rapid and unintelligible manner, for this was a case of importance. He explained what every one knew, to wit, that Frederick Blake stood there charged with being in unlawful possession of a bank-note, knowing the same to be stolen. The accused was about to speak, but the Clerk stopped him judicially:

"You may make any statement you please presently," he said, "after the examination of the

witnesses ; at present, as you are undefended, your wisest course is to say nothing."

At this moment Canon Smith got up.

"Mr Mayor," he said, "may I be allowed to give some information to the Bench?"

The Mayor started violently from his repose.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "Is it anything to do with the case?"

"Certainly."

Sir Daniel held a whispered conversation with the other magistrates and the Clerk, and then said sententiously :

"We cannot take your statement now. The other witnesses must be heard first. Then, if you have anything to say, you will be heard on oath."

The Canon bowed and sat down again. The audience wondered what he had to do with it. So did the Mayor, secretly. The Scotland Yard Inspector and the strange solicitor gazed hard at the Canon. The former, especially, scrutinised him with the air of a man to whom social position or "the cloth" were nothing, but "information" was everything.

"James Sturgess!"

Sturgess, the local bank manager, went into the witness-box and took the oath. His story was a very simple one. Blake had entered the bank in person the previous day and asked for cash for a twenty-pound note. He, Sturgess, had cashed

it, and immediately afterwards had compared the number with a private list of his own, when he discovered at once that it was one of a series stolen at the Worthingham Bank. Blake was still counting his money when this happened.

"What did you do then?" asked the Clerk.

"I said to Blake, 'Where did you get this note?' or words to that effect."

"And what did he reply?"

"He said he didn't know where it came from, and that he had received it by post."

"But surely he knew who was the sender?" asked the Mayor.

"That is all he said. He could account for it in no other way. I asked him to step into my private office, and sent for a policeman at once."

"Quite right," said the Mayor. "Is there anything else you have to tell us?"

"I think not."

"Stop a minute," said the strange lawyer, who had been whispering with the Scotland Yard Inspector. "How long have you had that list you refer to?"

"It was sent me a few days after the Worthingham robbery. It is usual for bank managers to receive lists of missing notes on such occasions."

"Quite so. What I want to ask you is whether you have had any previous suspicion that any of these notes were being circulated in the town?"

"None whatever. Every note passing through

our hands is properly entered, and I should have known at once."

"Thank you, Mr Sturgess."

"Constable Upston!"

Constable Upston deposed in a matter-of-fact way that he had been called into the Frattenbury Bank by the Manager, and had taken the prisoner in charge. Prisoner had remarked that he knew nothing whatever of the note, but that it had been sent to him in an envelope by post.

"Have you searched the prisoner?" asked the Mayor.

"Yes, your worship."

"And his house?"

"Yes, your worship."

"Did you find anything of an incriminating nature?"

"No, your worship."

"Did you find any envelope addressed to him?" put in the lawyer.

"No, sir."

"That completes the case against the prisoner so far as we have been able to go," said the Clerk.

"I ask for a remand until further evidence has been collected," said the lawyer.

"Have you anything to say, prisoner?" asked the Mayor severely.

"No, sir. Except that the note was sent me by

post, and I haven't the slightest notion where it came from."

"H'm!" said the Mayor, in the tone of voice of a man not easily credulous. "Well — er — Canon Smith, we can hear what you have to say now."

The Canon took the oath, gave his name, address and profession, and then consulted a memorandum.

"Was this the note in question?" he asked, reading a number.

The note was passed round to the magistrates.

"It was," replied the Mayor.

"Then I wish to state that it was I who sent it to Blake. I posted it on Tuesday evening by the last post."

A thrill of astonishment passed through the court, while the detective looked at the Canon harder than ever.

"You swear that you sent Blake this twenty-pound note?" asked Sir Daniel slowly.

"Yes."

"And what was your reason?"

"I happened to know that the man was in trouble, and I sent him the note anonymously."

A little murmur of applause ran round the back of the court.

"Silence!" cried the Mayor. "If there is any more noise I shall have the court cleared. You swear to this?" he repeated.

"I swear to it."

"Look at this note," went on the Mayor, passing it to him, "and be careful what you say. You swear that this twenty-pound note is the same that you posted anonymously to Blake?"

The Canon examined it carefully.

"Yes," he said deliberately, "it is the same note."

"Where did you get it?" asked Sir Daniel sharply, while the solicitor and the detective nodded their heads at each other in approval.

Now the Canon had gone to the court carefully prepared for this question. Of course he had not forgotten the Dean's threat to make known, as he thought, his little St Moritz escapade to the Bishop; and although he was annoyed about it, he knew very well that the Bishop could scarcely take any action, and would probably treat the whole matter as quite private. But the telling of all the facts by which he became possessed of that note in a public court was quite a different matter, and he felt justified in taking the line upon which he had determined.

"Where did you get it?"

"On the Continent."

The detective pricked up his ears, and the Mayor suddenly remembered the mysterious scandal at which the Dean had hinted.

"That is rather vague," he said; "perhaps you will inform the Bench the exact place and time when it came into your possession?"

"Certainly. At Thusis, in Switzerland, on January the twenty-sixth."

The detective rapidly consulted a note-book. He was becoming intensely interested.

"Who did you get it from?"

"A stranger staying at the same hotel with myself. I do not know who he was. He gave the name of Jones, and I never saw him before or since. He was an Englishman. We were both passing through Thusis in opposite directions. That is all I have to say."

The worthy Canon made this statement slowly and emphatically, earnestly hoping that it would be enough.

"How came he to give you the note?" asked the Mayor.

"I do not see that it is necessary to answer that question," replied the Canon. "I can only repeat that it came into my possession through him."

"Oh," said the Mayor, not quite satisfied, "it came into your possession from him, and you do not care to tell us how?"

"I do not see that it is necessary."

Here the solicitor, who had received a pencilled note from the detective, jumped up.

"Your worship!"

"Well?"

"I think we can quite understand why Canon Smith does not care to answer that question, and

I agree with him that it is not necessary. This man Jones was naturally anxious to get rid of his stolen notes, and I suppose he saw a chance of passing one on an innocent-looking clergyman."

Here a suppressed titter ran round the court. The Mayor, somehow, forgot to check it, as he felt the laugh was against the Canon, and he had not forgotten the previous evening. The Canon forgave the slight sarcasm freely, and began to breathe at ease. Events were taking the exact turn upon which he had calculated.

"But," said the solicitor, "the important point is the tracing of this Jones, and there the Canon may materially assist us. Can you describe him?" he asked the witness.

"Yes. He was a man of about forty, of middle height, with dark hair and a large brown moustache."

The detective's face brightened.

"Have you any idea where he was going?"

"Yes. He left for Paris the day after I met him, so the hotel-keeper told me. That was by the first train, before I was up. I did not see him that morning."

"On the twenty-seventh of January?"

"No, on the morning of the twenty-sixth."

The Mayor looked up sharply from his notes.

"But you told us that he gave you the note on the twenty-sixth. You meant the twenty-fifth?"

"No," replied the Canon a little uneasily ; "I gave you the correct date."

"How could he have given you the note on that day when you never saw him?"

"I did not say he gave me the note. I said it came into my possession on the twenty-sixth."

"I must really ask you to give the Bench fuller particulars," said the Mayor pompously. "Who actually gave you the note?"

"No one," replied the Canon, getting more discomfited, much to the Mayor's joy.

"Did he send it to you?"

"No."

"I think," went on the Mayor, "that for the sake of all concerned you must be more explicit. Where was the note when you first saw it?"

The Canon thought a moment.

"In a waistcoat pocket," he said. There was no way out of it.

"Did the waistcoat belong to this man Jones?"

"Yes."

"Was he wearing it at the time?"

"No."

"Canon Smith," said the Mayor in a solemn voice, "you appear to be playing with us ; you asked to be heard, and I must warn you that you have taken an oath to tell the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing but the truth. What were you doing with this man's waistcoat when he was not wearing it?"

There was a hushed expectancy for the Canon's reply.

"I was wearing it myself!" he replied.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Mayor. "And perhaps you will be good enough to tell us why you were wearing another man's waistcoat on the morning of the twenty-sixth of January in this Thusis hotel?"

"I was not wearing it in the morning."

"When were you wearing it, then? Be careful, Canon Smith," said the Mayor sternly.

He was having his revenge sevenfold.

"I was wearing it in the evening at St Moritz," replied the Canon, driven to desperation. "An unfortunate—er—accident occurred. This man Jones left his clothes behind him at Thusis and took mine, and I had to wear his. The twenty-pound note was in the pocket of his dress suit, which I did not put on till I reached St Moritz that evening. I have kept the note ever since with the intention of returning it to the owner should I ever meet with him. It happened that I was out of cash the other night, and I, as it were, borrowed it to send to Blake. There—that is the whole story."

There was a roar of laughter at the back of the court. The Mayor restrained it, but, oh, how he enjoyed the sound thereof! He had his enemy in the toils, and he was determined not to spare him.

"And a most extraordinary story it is," he said in a properly shocked tone. "Do you mean to tell us

that he left his other clothes as well, and that you wore them?"

"Yes," replied the Canon, reddening to the roots of his hair.

The detective had scribbled another hasty note to the solicitor, who now rose to his feet once more.

"I should like to ask Canon Smith another question."

"Certainly," said the Mayor graciously.

"These other clothes. Was the man Jones wearing them the previous day?"

"Yes," said the Canon.

"Please describe them."

Amid much tittering the unhappy dignitary gave a hasty description of that awful check suit. It seemed to please the detective.

"Now," went on the Mayor, "I will ask you to be good enough to tell us whether you made any attempt to discover this man whom you say left his clothes for you to wear?"

"I did not."

"You mentioned it to the hotel proprietor, of course."

"No."

"Why not?"

"There was very little time. He had gone by the early train, and I chose to say nothing."

"Oh! And how long did you remain at St Moritz?"

The Clerk was making violent signs to the Mayor, who was going beyond his office in his exultation. But the latter persisted.

"About a week."

"Oh! You remained a week at St Moritz, wearing this other man's garments, in possession of his twenty pounds—stolen property—and you made no attempt to trace him?"

"I did not know it was a stolen note; it was only when I heard of Blake's arrest that the truth flashed upon me. I have kept it, with the clothes, in the hope that I might be able one day to restore it. I was the victim of circumstances, and I have now told the Bench all I know about it."

The Mayor rubbed his hands with much satisfaction.

"I must say," he said, "that your conduct was most peculiar, and I wonder that you were content to remain in masquerade. I——"

"I believe it is not customary to censure witnesses for having spoken the truth," broke in the Canon hotly. "If you have any more questions I shall endeavour to answer them; if not, I presume my evidence is at an end."

"Oh, we have heard quite enough, I think," replied the Mayor sarcastically; "unless you have anything else to ask?"

He spoke to the solicitor.

"No," replied the latter. "Canon Smith has thrown quite a light on the subject, and I would like to speak to him privately. I only regret that it never occurred to him to consult the police on the matter, but of course he did not know who this man

Jones was, and I can understand that he would wish to avoid publicity."

The Mayor consulted with his colleagues for a minute, and then he said:

"The case is dismissed!"

The Canon turned to the solicitor,

"You wanted a word with me?"

"If it is convenient. And perhaps you would not mind the Inspector here asking you some questions?"

"Not at all. I suggest that you both come home with me. Excuse me a moment. Blake," he went on, turning to the verger, who had stepped out of the dock, a free man, "I'm very sorry I've caused you all this annoyance. Please take this envelope. Don't open it now. I knew of your trouble and I wanted to help you."

The man stammered his thanks. When he reached home he opened the envelope and found a check for twenty pounds in it. The Canon walked off with the solicitor, followed by the detective-inspector. There was a crowd at the door, and not a few broad grins greeted the Canon as he passed out. One man shouted excitedly:

"Look! that's the London detective followin' 'im. I'll bet 'e ain't a-goin' to allow 'im out of 'is sight. It's a rum go!"

The Canon overheard this remark and blushed a little, for he felt that his position was a trifle ridiculous. When he reached the Residence the two men

went in with him, and a long consultation took place.

"I am really very sorry for you, Canon Smith," said the solicitor; "and I must say that the Mayor appeared viciously pleased to get your awkward dilemma out of you."

"He's not exactly a friend of mine," replied the Canon grimly. "The story was a curious one, I don't doubt, but I was placed in extremely awkward circumstances at the time, and I had to make the best of it."

"Quite so. But you will give the Inspector and myself a few more details, in confidence."

"You have every right to ask for them."

"Well," broke in the Inspector, "the case stands in this way: this man Jones answers to the description of the fellow we have wanted all along. He's an exceedingly clever chap. We had our suspicions when the robbery took place, and we very soon found out that he was the principal. We traced him to the Continent, and were well on his track, when, somehow or other, it leaked out to a newspaper fellow that we were after him in Switzerland and had nearly caught him at Zürich. The newspaper published this, and evidently he took the warning. Now, would you mind telling us exactly how he changed clothes with you?"

The Canon gave him the details, omitting the man's letter. This was not necessary.

"H'm! That was just when we missed all traces of him," said the detective; "and he went to Paris, did he? It's very queer. Oh, but he's a sharp chap. He's been getting rid of the notes. We know that; but he's been precious clever over it, and we really haven't any idea where to put a finger on him. When we *do* catch him we shall want you as a witness."

The solicitor laughed.

"You needn't worry over that, Canon Smith," he said; "we shall not submit you to such an ordeal as you went through this morning."

The story of the Canon's evidence spread very quickly over Frattenbury and formed the subject of discussion everywhere. They say a fierce light beats down upon a throne. Perhaps almost a fiercer light shines on a clergyman. The tale was twisted in many ways, and much exaggerated, and before the evening closed in, all sorts of rumours had got about. It was hinted that the Canon was in league with swindlers; that he had tried to pass off a stolen note and very narrowly escaped being committed for trial, and that he would have been committed if he hadn't been a parson, which thing "showed as how there was one law for the rich and another for the poor"; that his every movement was being shadowed by detectives; that he had only escaped the police abroad by adopting a disguise—in short, the goddess of Scandal held high revel in Frattenbury.

But then she often found her abode in Cathedral Cities congenial. She might have had a statue in the Close.

Anyway, Canon Smith, popular as he had become with many, was under a cloud. The more good-natured only laughed at him and his predicament. There were some who stood up for him. There were others, under the shadow of the Cathedral, who were scarcely kind.

CHAPTER XVI

"GOOD gracious," exclaimed Miss Millington, when the news first broke upon them, "it is worse and worse! I never heard of such a thing in my life! A dignitary of Frattenbury Cathedral going about in a light check suit with stolen bank-notes! How pained the dear Bishop will be when he hears of it! Whatever made him do it?" And she added beneath her breath: "There must have been something wrong, or he would have found the man who had stolen his clothes. He must be a doubtful character."

"He'll have to explain matters a little more fully," snapped Bella, "if he *can*. It's terrible to think that we had him in the house, and that he actually addressed the Guild of St Roger. I hope the Dean won't let him preach in the Cathedral any more. I should think he'd be ashamed to, though."

"And we all thought so much of him!" sighed Daisy.

"Don't say *we*," ejaculated Bella; "I *always* thought there was something queer about him."

"But you didn't say so at first," said Daisy mildly.

"Daisy!" put in Miss Millington, "why will you always try to argue things? If Bella has an opinion of her own, it is not your place to flatly contradict her. Naturally, we were all prepared to welcome Canon Smith to the Close, and it was right that we should—er—ask him to tea occasionally. But this is a shocking state of affairs now. Every one is talking about it."

"But," said Jane quietly, "surely it is very simple? It wasn't Canon Smith's fault that all this happened. It was an unfortunate position for him to be placed in, but he explained it all."

Bella regarded her witheringly.

"I don't think you quite understand, Jane dear," she said icily; "the position was a *most* peculiar one, and it is strange that it took a Court of Justice to drag the—er—truth, or what he called the truth, from him."

"I think Sir Daniel acted admirably," broke in Miss Millington; "it must have been a painful duty for him, a *very* painful duty."

"I don't think," went on Jane rather hotly—for she was beginning to get a little out of patience with her aunts—"I don't think it is fair to talk of Canon Smith like this. It is perfectly natural that he should have kept the matter to himself. There was no occasion for him to mention it."

Miss Millington drew herself up into her severest attitude.

"Jane," she said, "it is not quite the thing for a young girl to give vent to her opinions as you do. This is a public scandal. We have never, in all the years we have resided in the Close, associated with *anybody* who has had to answer to a charge in a police court."

"But he hasn't," replied Jane; "you talk, Auntie, as if he were a prisoner in the dock. He only gave evidence to save a man from being imprisoned. Why, a stolen bank-note might come into *anybody's* possession—even yours."

"I trust not," replied Miss Millington haughtily; "stolen property does not *generally* pass into the hands of innocent persons, and I must say that the whole thing is suspicious. Isn't it, Bella? Yes, exceedingly suspicious. And," she went on, as if delivering an awful fiat, "until Canon Smith gives a *better* explanation than he did at the police court, I shall order James to say 'Not at home' if he calls."

She sighed, perhaps suddenly remembering earlier possibilities that had occurred to her.

"To my mind," said Bella, "it is all part and parcel of the other affair. I'll tell you exactly what I think."

And she went on to prove a very pretty little theory. Canon Smith was an inveterate gambler in private life. He had won that twenty-pound note playing cards with some criminal, and probably

knew it to be stolen. That was why he had sent it to Blake. It was a way of getting rid of it. She did not explain, by the way, why the Canon came forward of his own free will to extricate Blake. He had, probably, disguises while travelling on the Continent, and the story about the other man's clothes was all made up. Then he went on to Mentone. "And, depend upon it," said Bella, "it *was* he who was gambling at Monte Carlo."

Jane had stood it bravely, but her indignation got the better of her.

"I told you he had never been to Mentone," she said, rising from her chair.

"Ah, so *he* said!" exclaimed Bella.

"Of course he wouldn't say he had been there," said Daisy.

"I should say," said Jane, with a very flushed face, catching her breath in anger, and going out of the room, "I should say it is not very wise of you to talk about him like this. It sounds libellous."

Miss Millington looked at her in dumb amazement as she went out of the door.

"Well," she exclaimed to her sisters, "Jane forgets herself! She is actually accusing us of talking slander. I *never* heard of such a thing! I shall speak to her seriously by and by."

Of course Sir Daniel had gone home from the court and told his daughter the whole story. He

was brimming over with satisfaction at having what he considered to be his revenge on the Canon. The point that he appreciated was having made the latter a public laughing-stock. The fact was that he knew very well that he himself had been upheld to public ridicule over the Town Council Meeting, and it was a relief to his feelings to have been able to put the Canon into a somewhat similar predicament. Beyond this his mind had really not gone very far. The confusion of the Canon in the witness-box, the roar of laughter which had greeted his enforced evidence, these were the points that were of special sweetness to the Mayor. It was a *public* revenge.

Eleanor listened to his story attentively. She was really sorry for Canon Smith, though very much inclined to smile when she heard for the first time of the exchange of clothes. She could understand now the real reason of his shyness, and she admired him for the way in which he had tried to master a disagreeable position, until his attack of cowardice.

"By the way," said her father presently, "*you* must have been in St Moritz at the time; how very strange! Perhaps he saw you there. I wonder you never noticed him."

"Oh, there were so many people coming and going at St Moritz," said Eleanor evasively.

"The Dean knew something about this," went

on Sir Daniel; "at least, he hinted at it. I think he has been very forbearing in saying nothing."

"What was there to say?" asked Eleanor. "The whole thing appears to have been just an awkward predicament, that's all."

"Ah," said Sir Daniel, "I daresay. That's all very well, but it's made him look a little foolish—just a *little* foolish. He ought to have been more careful, in his position. It's a lesson to him!"

Later in the day he met the Dean, and of course the inevitable topic of conversation was started.

"Ah," said Sir Daniel, "so what you were hinting at the other day has all come out. I *think* I got the whole story from him. It was my duty as a magistrate to do so."

"No," replied the Dean, lowering his voice mysteriously, "it has *not* all come out. What I happen to know about Canon Smith is quite another story."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Sir Daniel.

The Dean nodded his head solemnly.

"Indeed I do. I think, Sir Daniel, that perhaps I am justified in telling you what I know."

Sir Daniel thought so, too.

Whereupon the Dean laid bare the awful facts about the Canon's gambling and drinking propensities.

"I cannot help concluding, much against my

will," he said, "that this affair at St Moritz only corroborates the other."

His mind was evidently set in the same channel of delightful conjecture as that of Bella Millington.

"You see," he went on, "you see, Sir Daniel, Canon Smith has always been evasive as to his movements on the Continent. He was evasive with *you*."

"Most evasive—oh, *most* evasive."

"Quite so. He was evasive with *me*. I say it reluctantly, because I should be the last to cast a slur upon one of the Chapter; but I am *afraid* that if we were to collect the whole facts we should find that Canon Smith's holiday abroad would by no means bear investigation. My wife—who, I'm sure, is always most charitable—agrees with me."

"Dear me, dear me! Yes, I think so too. There is *something* wrong with the man."

"There is *something* wrong with the man, and," went on the Dean, "it is getting talked about. Naturally, this St Moritz affair is creating a scandal. It is unpleasant. All the time I have been Dean of Frattenbury the Chapter has been above suspicion; but now, people *will* talk, and, as you say, there is *something* wrong with the man. We haven't got to the root of the matter yet."

When the Dean mentioned that people would talk, he might have included Sir Daniel in that category,

for the worthy knight generally found it rather a difficult matter at any time not to gossip; and at this particular juncture he was so excited over what he was pleased to call the "exposure of Canon Smith," that he dropped a broad hint to Eleanor to the effect that the Dean knew something more and something worse about the Canon. By dint of a little strategical cross-questioning Eleanor drew the salient points from him, and gathered that the last state of the scandal was likely to be a great deal worse than the first. She did not, to do her credit, believe for an instant in the gambling story, but she saw that if it got about, especially in connection with the other, that the Canon was likely to be seriously compromised, and she took Everett into her confidence and asked him what he thought was best to be done.

"By Jove," exclaimed Everett Horne in disgust, "I never saw such a hotbed for scandal as that holy Close is! It grows there like American Bell-bind. I wonder where on earth my uncle got hold of such a yarn? It's positively ridiculous."

"It makes me quite angry," she replied. "I've an immense respect for Canon Smith—I think he's done wonders—and something ought to be done to clear him."

"Serve my uncle right if the Canon had an action against him for slander," said Everett emphatically. "I'll tell you what, Eleanor, I'll do what I can to

get to the bottom of this. Meanwhile, I think he ought to be told of these rumours."

"So do I."

"Very well," said the practical Everett; "let's go and call on him now, and tell him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Eleanor, "you don't want me to come with you?"

"Yes, I do. You may be useful in talking over things."

"But, my dear Everett, think how uncomfortable it will make the poor dear man."

"Bosh! He's got to face you sooner or later, and—I'd rather like to see the meeting."

So they called on the Canon together, and were shown into the drawing-room. A minute later Canon Smith entered, looking a little red and uncomfortable. There was silence for a moment or two, broken by Eleanor.

"Everett and I have called to tell you something we thought you ought to know," she began. "I feel sure you won't visit the father's sins upon his child; and, in the first place, I'm most awfully sorry for all you had to go through the other morning."

Canon Smith looked at her and she at him; a smile began to break upon both their faces.

"I'm afraid," said the Canon, "that I have been rather a dissembler—and I daresay Mr Horne thinks so too."

The smile broadened on Eleanor's face, and a

twinkle shone in her eyes. She was sitting on a low chair. Then, bursting into a laugh, she suddenly exclaimed :

"One—two—*bob!*"

And she leaned forward as they did on the bob-sleighs.

The Canon's face was crimson, but he burst into a hearty laugh, and the other two caught the infection.

"The 'Cheshire Cats'!" said the Canon; "I must own up!"

"Ach-tung!" cried Eleanor, shaking with laughter. "Wasn't it jolly?"

"Capital!"

"You remember how you were pitched into the snow-bank?"

"I do, indeed."

"You haven't forgotten the 'Sandy Saint'?"

"Certainly not."

"Or how you ran away from poor me?"

"It was—er—a sudden impulse."

"Though you had a whole night to sleep on it?" asked Eleanor mischievously. "Come now, admit you were a little afraid of me!"

"Yes, I was," said the Canon honestly. "Several times I've been almost inclined to speak to you about St Moritz when I met you. I was, to tell you the truth, glad at first that you had not recognised me, but afterwards, especially when I

found out that others knew about it, I wished you had."

"Yes," said Eleanor demurely, "I saw you were glad when you thought I did not remember you at the Millingtons' tea-fight."

The Canon looked at her in astonishment.

"Then you *did* recognise me?"

"Of course I did—but I knew you didn't want me to. And then, afterwards, when I found out that there were rumours, I was afraid you might hear of them and think I had spread them."

"No," replied the Canon, "I knew you hadn't—though how the Dean found out about my unfortunate predicament, I am at a loss to tell."

"Come now," said Everett, "don't call it unfortunate."

"Well," said the Canon reflectively. "I don't think it was—no, I'm sure it wasn't."

"I'm so glad to hear you say that, Canon Smith," said Eleanor warmly; "and you must confess that, unknowingly, I posted you up in many things about Frattenbury. Didn't I?"

"Miss Taylor," replied the Canon, with the air of a man making a not unpleasing admission, "I will say frankly that that week at St Moritz altered my views on more matters than one."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Eleanor triumphantly.

"But now," broke in Everett, "let me tell you why we called. You say you wonder how my uncle got

hold of the St Moritz story? Well, he never knew anything about it till you gave your evidence before Sir Daniel. It was a very different rumour about you, and we think you ought to know what it was."

And he told the Canon the principal details. The latter looked grave.

"I cannot understand it at all," he said; "there is not a shadow of truth in it."

"We were sure there wasn't," replied Eleanor.

Then the Canon, suddenly seeing the humorous side of the situation, burst into a fit of laughter.

"I don't know *what* your uncle must think of me, Mr Horne," he said. "He charged me with this new rumour, it appears, and I, thinking he was alluding to St Moritz, told him it was a very ordinary thing and that many clergymen did it. No wonder he was horribly shocked!"

And he recounted the interview in the vestry, omitting, of course, the part about Blake.

"Now I did nothing at St Moritz that could have given rise to such a story as he heard, did I?"

Eleanor shook her head.

"But," said Everett, "it wasn't at St Moritz that my uncle meant."

"Where, then?"

"Apparently you gambled at the Monte Carlo tables, but you were staying at Mentone."

The Canon started.

"That accounts for it!" he ejaculated.

"For what?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the Canon, slightly confused. He was thinking of Jane Rutland's question. *Now* he understood. She had been trying to clear him, and the thought, somehow, pleased him immensely.

"I can assure you the whole story is utterly without foundation," he went on; "it is very good of you to come and tell me."

"Not at all," said Everett; "but we think you ought to be cleared of the scandal."

A consultation followed. Finally Canon Smith said that before he did anything he should like to run over to Market Shapborough and talk matters over with his solicitor.

"I shall go to-morrow morning," he said, "and come back by the last train. I have several things to do there. Stransome, my solicitor, is a very sensible man, and I should like to have his advice. I certainly don't feel prepared to allow this scandal to circulate, though I should be sorry to have recourse to a legal action. I will let you know what Stransome says when I return."

"I think you are quite right," said Eleanor, rising to go.

"Meanwhile," said Everett Horne, as he, too, got up, "you may rely upon me to do all in my power to find out how and where this rumour originated."

"Thanks very much. Stop a minute; I want to show you both something. Do you mind waiting while I go and fetch it?"

He went to his study, and returned presently, holding a letter in his hand.

"I will take you both into my confidence," he said, "and explain to you what was scarcely necessary to do in court—the real reason why I never suspected this man Jones of being a thief, but only looked upon him as a practical joker of an unpleasant kind. I must tell you that we had had some conversation on the subject, and that he had been advocating my adopting lay clothing on my holiday. Now this is what I found pinned to his suit in my room the next morning."

He handed Eleanor the letter. She read it out loud.

"Do you know, I sympathise with you deeply," she said, after she had read it. "I can quite understand why you said nothing at the hotel, and why you made no attempt to follow up this man Jones. But he had a strong sense of the ridiculous."

"He had," exclaimed the Canon drily.

"Everett," said Eleanor, a few minutes after they had left the Canon, "this man Jones took Canon Smith's clothes and went off as a parson."

"Well?"

"Perhaps *he* could solve the riddle of the Mentone scandal."

"By George, that's a good idea!" said Everett; "but if that's the case, the sooner the police get him, the better for the Canon."

CHAPTER XVII

THE next morning the Canon went off by an early train to Market Shapborough, and Everett Horne, who had been thinking out the case carefully, after looking over his morning consignment of fish, walked round to the Deanery and asked to see his uncle. Without any preface he struck home at once.

"I understand, Uncle, that you've been propagating a slander about Canon Smith," he began, "and, as he's a particular friend of mine, I thought I'd come and see you about it."

"Really, Everett," said the Dean, who did not care at all for his nephew's blunt manner, "I must decline to give you any information about it."

"Oh, very well," said Everett, "just as you like—only I happen to know that you told Sir Daniel Taylor that Canon Smith was playing at Monte Carlo, and was drunk at Mentone. I thought the Canon ought to know, and I told him."

"That was quite superfluous," said the Dean disdainfully; "I told him myself a fortnight ago."

'You thought you did, but you didn't,' replied

Everett. "The Canon explained that you spoke ambiguously about his behaviour abroad, and he simply imagined you had got hold of the St Moritz story, and were referring to that."

The Dean was nonplussed. Off went his glasses, and he began tapping the table with them, pinching up his lower lip with his other hand.

"Oh," he said, "is that what he said?"

"Look here, Uncle," said Everett slowly, "I'm not going to mince matters. This story about Canon Smith and Monte Carlo is, in plain language, a damned lie."

"Everett! I beg that you will not use such language."

"Oh, it's no worse than parts of the Athanasian Creed, and far more charitable. Now, will you tell me how you got hold of it?"

"No, it was told me in confidence."

"That didn't prevent you from publishing it, and it is the publication of a libel that the law looks at. I'm sorry you don't feel inclined to tell me, for I really think it would be best for you; but, of course, you know your own business. Good morning, Uncle."

And he picked up his hat and stick, which he had laid on the floor.

But it was too much for the Dean. He had turned very white. Everett had judged his man, and attacked him perfectly.

"Do you mean to imply, Everett," said the Dean,

"that you think there is any danger of—ahem—an action?"

Everett stood up.

"If I were in Canon Smith's place," he said, "I would have a full explanation from you; and if I didn't get it, I'd pretty soon claim damages for slander—I hope he will, too."

"But," said the Dean, who was beginning to hedge, "I had the story on very good authority, and——"

"Did you ever know a scandal that *wasn't* founded on that phrase?" sneered Everett.

"And," went on the Dean, ignoring the sarcasm, "I did him the justice to warn him——"

"To threaten him!"

"I—er—told him I thought the Bishop ought to know, certainly; that was only my duty, and he did not deny the allegation. Of course, what you have told me now puts a different light upon it. And yet—and yet—the facts are very circumstantial."

"All right, Uncle; the slander emanates from you, and there's an end of it."

"Stop a minute—stop a minute. It does *not* emanate from me. It was brought to me in confidence——"

"And you gave the show away, you see; so you're liable."

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the Dean irritably, "you are judging hastily. Perhaps I had better tell you the whole story."

"The fact of the matter is, Uncle," said Everett, "that I don't quite understand your system of ethics. Perhaps it is because I have not studied the theological and casuistical aspect of morality, but only look at things from a rough, matter-of-fact standpoint. I don't see how you could allow such confidences, when Canon Smith's reputation was concerned."

The Dean winced and flushed crimson.

"You forget," he said, "that in—er—my position as a priest of the Church it is sometimes—ahem—my duty to—er—receive statements——"

"I believe," broke in Everett coldly, "that in the *Roman* Church a priest is not supposed to listen to any private statements in Confession that have any relation to a third person. It is an excellent rule for all priests to observe."

The Dean bit his lip.

"I will not discuss the matter any further," he said, "but I will try and give you the opportunity of seeing for yourself that my information was extremely credible. Please wait while I write a note."

He sat down at his writing-table and wrote the following:—

"DEAR MISS MILLINGTON, — I shall be much obliged if you will kindly allow my nephew to see the letter from your sister's friend that you showed me some weeks ago. He is acting on behalf of

H*

Canon Smith, and, as certain reports have reached his ear, I think it will be best for him to know whence they emanated. I cannot very well tell him myself, as you showed me the letter in confidence.
—Yours very truly, F. HORNE."

"There," he said, directing the letter and handing it to Everett, "if you take this to Miss Millington I think that——"

"That *you* will be safe—eh, Uncle?" interrupted Everett, who was more disgusted than ever. "I thought there were some old women at the bottom of it, and that they probably lived in the Close. I hear the bell ringing for service, and I won't detain you from going and saying a thanksgiving. Good morning!"

He left his uncle, who began to robe, feeling exceedingly angry and uncomfortable as he put on his surplice. A few minutes later a verger was preceding the Dean through the cloisters, while Everett called at the Millingtons'. James opened the door and told him, in answer to his enquiries, that he was not sure whether Miss Millington was at home, but he would see, if Everett would take a seat in the drawing-room.

In a minute or two Jane Rutland entered, looking rather flushed and excited, and in her hat and jacket.

"Good morning," she said. "My aunts have all gone to service at the Cathedral."

"Oh," he said, "I'll call again. I want to see Miss Millington particularly. Perhaps you'll kindly give her this note from the Dean?"

"Oh yes, Mr Horne," she went on with a little hesitation in her manner. "I believe you're a friend of Canon Smith?"

"I am," he replied; "it was really on his business that I called this morning. There's a wretched scandal on foot about him, and I want to get to the bottom of it."

He put it out as a feeler, in his blunt manner for Jane somehow gave him confidence.

"I believe I can help you," she said, her face brightening with pleasure. "Indeed, I was just going to ask you whether you would help me and go and see Canon Smith. I have just had a letter that I think would interest him."

"He is away to-day—at Market Shapborough."

"Oh! But there is no time to be lost — I'm sure of it."

"Perhaps I might see this letter?" he asked. "I'm in the Canon's confidence, and I might be able to act for him."

"I'm sure you could," she answered; "here's the letter, and this is the part that refers to him. It's from my friend, Maud Caxton, who is companion to a Mrs Barrett. They have been travelling on the Continent for some months, and this is written as you see, from Ostend."

The particular passage in the letter was this :—

"It's so long since I wrote, that I hardly remember the last news you had, but I fancy Mrs Barrett must have told Miss Daisy Millington about the clergyman we saw at Mentone, and who turned out to be a Canon of Frattenbury Cathedral. He was a dreadful character. Well, I saw him again to-day, here at Ostend!—only the funny part of it is that he's not dressed as a clergyman now—perhaps he's ashamed of himself. He didn't see me, but I recognised him at once. He's evidently staying at the Hôtel D'Angleterre, and was with some *very* French-looking ladies! I wonder he isn't afraid of being found out!"

Everett Horne brought his hand down with a slap on his knee.

"*Now* I understand!" he cried. "Of course this clears the good Canon at once."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Jane, "but there's more in it, don't you think? I'm sure this is Jones—the man who changed clothes with him at Thusis—the Worthingham Bank robber."

"Hallo!" ejaculated Everett, "there's something in that."

"Of course there is — he wore Canon Smith's clothes when he went to Paris. Then he must have gone south to Mentone."

"How did he come to be mistaken for Canon Smith there?"

"It's no secret now; I'll tell you."

And she explained how Maud Caxton's letter referred to the finding of one of Canon Smith's cards at Mentone on the strange clergyman.

"I see!" exclaimed Everett—"he had taken our friend's visiting-cards as well as his clothes. You're right, Miss Rutland, he's the man. When was that letter of yours posted?"

"Yesterday."

"There's not a minute to be lost, then; I'll go and see about it at once."

"What are you going to do?"

"Get this man arrested—I'm off to the Superintendent. Splendid! Miss Rutland, splendid! You've cleared the Canon of this nasty scandal. Never mind about giving that letter to your aunt now."

In less than an hour's time Scotland Yard received the news by wire, and immediately telegraphed to Ostend. By one o'clock that day the Ostend police moved.

Meanwhile the Canon consulted his solicitor at Market Shapborough, explaining everything to him. Mr Stransome thought the question over, and finally advised the Canon to let him write to the Dean a courteous letter asking for the foundation of the rumour. To this plan Canon Smith consented, as he thought it might be a salutary lesson to the Dean. He transacted some other business of a

parochial nature with his curate, who was in charge of the parish during his residence at Frattenbury, and finally took the last train back.

He was looking casually out of the window while stopping at Foxby Junction, when his eye caught the contents bill of an evening paper, and he read these words:—

“ARREST OF THE WORTHINGHAM BANK ROBBER!”

In a couple of seconds he hailed a passing news-boy and bought a paper, eagerly turning it over until he found the information he wanted in a late news paragraph.

“*Central News Telegram*.—Ronaldson, the man who has been wanted for some months in connection with the Worthingham Bank Robbery of last year, has been arrested to-day at Ostend, where he was staying at an hotel. The circumstances are not yet forthcoming.”

He arrived at Frattenbury in an exceedingly excited state. There, on the platform, he found Everett Horne waiting for him. The Canon waved the newspaper as he got out of the train.

“Have you heard?” he cried.

“Rather!” replied Everett, shaking his hand warmly. “I congratulate you. We’ve been at work here to some purpose to-day.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well,” said Everett, “you have to thank Miss

Rutland for what has happened; it was she who put us on the right scent. I've got some supper waiting for you at home, so come along and I'll tell you the whole story."

As they passed Rice's shop the tobacconist saw them and darted out.

"Very glad to hear the news, Canon Smith," he exclaimed, "and I know you'll be glad, too."

"Thank you, thank you," said the Canon.

"So," soliloquised Canon Smith before he retired for the night, "it was she who found it out. I shall certainly call and thank her to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVIII

"PRISONER at the Bar," said the judge in a severe voice, "you have heard the verdict of the jury, a verdict with which I entirely agree. Have you anything to say for yourself before I proceed to pronounce sentence upon you?"

George Ronaldson, *alias* Jones, *alias* Brown, looked round the crowded court unabashed. He was the same man with whom the Canon had dined that night at the Thusis hotel, but had shaved off his moustache. Overwhelming evidence had been brought against him, and he stood there, convicted of having stolen a very large sum in notes and gold from the Worthingham Bank.

Among others the Canon had given evidence against him, proving him to have been the man from whom he had received the stolen note. He had conducted his own case, but while cross-questioning the other witnesses smartly and at some length, he had allowed Canon Smith's statement to go unchallenged.

"Have you anything to say?"

Ronaldson's eye lit on the Canon, who was waiting to hear sentence pronounced.

"Yes, my lord," he replied, "if you will kindly allow me to do so."

"Go on," said the judge.

"Well, my lord, I congratulate the gentlemen of the jury upon their shrewdness, and acknowledge the justice of their verdict"—here he waved his hand affably to the foreman. "Fate has given me up. As a philosopher I am resigned. I have had some very enjoyable months at the expense of the Worthingham Bank, and I am glad to know that the Bank could well afford it."

"Ronaldson," interrupted the judge, "I warn you that such statements as these are not to the point."

"Thank you, my lord. What I wanted to say is, that I am sorry I have put Canon Smith to some inconvenience, and that I have been the cause, so I understand, of some unfortunate rumours about him. I feel I owe him an apology. My changing clothes with him was a necessity, and I did it as gracefully as possible, giving him an explanation that he quite understood without telling him the real reason. But I never meant to leave that note in my waistcoat. It was foolish of me. It has made things unpleasant for him, and has recoiled on myself as well. I hope he will accept my apologies.

The police have charge of his clerical garments which I borrowed, and I trust they will give them to him. They are little the worse for wear. If he has my clothes still, I make him a present of them as some little compensation. He may find them useful in his holidays; if not, I have no doubt he has deserving poor in his parish. That is all I have to say, my lord."

The judge had been growing sterner than ever, especially as he saw more than one smile on the faces around him. He addressed the prisoner severely, dwelling at some length on the enormity of the crime having been committed by an intellectual man.

"As to your apology to Canon Smith," he went on, "while regretting your flippant manner, I am glad you had sufficient decency left you to make it. The injury which you might very easily have done to one engaged in a sacred calling is no small matter, and I am glad to know that Canon Smith has been cleared of most unpleasant rumours regarding him. George Ronaldson, I sentence you to seven years' penal servitude!"

Ronaldson bowed.

"Thank you, my lord," he said; "I consider you have done your duty—and even exceeded it."

He was led away by the warders in charge of him, while Canon Smith, amid the subdued buzz that succeeded the passing of the sentence, pressed

forward towards the judge to catch the latter as he went out.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I want you to grant me a favour. May I have an interview with Ronaldson?"

"Oh, certainly, Canon Smith," said the judge, smiling slightly, for the humour of the situation had really appealed to him; "if you will come into the room I will make an order at once."

Ten minutes later the Canon found himself in front of a double grating, while Ronaldson was brought behind it by a warder.

"I came to thank you for your apology," said the Canon, "and to say how sorry I am to see you in this position. Can I do anything for you?"

Ronaldson looked at him keenly.

"It is very good of you, Canon Smith," he said. "I was afraid you would be terribly angry."

"No, I'm not—or I shouldn't be here now."

"I believe you, and I appreciate it. Thank you, but there is nothing you can do. I must grin and bear it."

"That is so—and afterwards?"

"I can't look forward to the end of seven years."

"But I can. I'm not going to preach to you, but only to say this: you will be allowed to receive occasional letters and visitors. Would letters and visits from myself be welcome to you in any way?"

I don't want to presume, and I'm only speaking as man to man."

A serious look came across the man's face, to be succeeded by a slight smile.

"Did you try the experiment I proposed to you at our last interview?" he asked.

"I did—to the letter."

"I thought so. If you hadn't tried it you wouldn't have put things in this way. Yes, I should like you to write and to see me if you will. No one else is ever likely to do it. Thank you, Canon Smith. I say, I hope you didn't mind what I said about those clothes?"

"No," said the Canon, "I don't think I shall want to wear them again, though I admit they served a purpose; so I shall keep the knickerbocker suit and your dress things till you come out."

"I shall scarcely have any use for the latter just then."

"Yes, you will. I generally dress for dinner, and, if I'm alive, I shall want you to be my guest for a week or two."

Ronaldson said nothing. Something welling up in his throat prevented him.

"You see," went on the Canon quietly, "I really owe you a debt of gratitude, though I was very angry with you at the time. You forced things upon me in a new light, and I don't mean to lose sight of you. One good turn deserves another."

The flippant look had passed from Ronaldson's face, and he was silent.

"Tell me," said the Canon, "for my own curiosity. What prompted you to change clothes? Had you thought about doing so before we began that conversation."

"No," replied Ronaldson, "it was the conversation and the newspaper that put it into my head. I saw a paragraph in the paper stating that the police were close on my track, and then the idea of the disguise came to me. I gave you a drugged cigar to make you sleep. The ticket for Paris was a blind. I got out at Zürich, crossed over to Lucerne, went through the St Gothard to Genoa, and then on to Mentone."

"Where you were taken for me," said the Canon.

"I was afraid I was," replied the man. "I took the name of Smith out of bravado, having your card-case, but I never used any of the cards. One day, at Mentone, I dropped the case, and there was a chance of people seeing inside. Then it struck me that perhaps I wasn't safe, so off I went. Now I come to think of it, it's a wonder I was never arrested before."

The Canon felt his shoulder tapped.

"Time's up, please, sir," said a warder respectfully, but firmly; "I must ask you to come now."

'Good-bye; you'll hear from me," said the Canon.

"Good-bye—and thank you," replied Ronaldson in a low voice.

Not once had Canon Smith upbraided the man or mentioned his crime ; and therein lay wisdom and the power of something broader than the ecclesiastical mind and judgment.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Misses Millington were seated in their prim drawing-room. The eldest of the three was knitting assiduously, Bella was reading, and Daisy was struggling through the accounts of her "Mission to Cinder-Sifters." Jane was doing some needlework in a far corner.

"I must confess I am surprised," exclaimed Miss Millington, breaking the silence and addressing no one in particular; "and I should never have believed it if Mrs Horne had not told me so herself. What could he see in her? I don't suppose he sees *anything*—but then, she has money, or will have it."

"After the way that Everett Horne has behaved, I wonder at Sir Daniel consenting—forty-six pence are three and tenpence," murmured Daisy.

"I don't believe he *has* consented," said Bella, laying her book on her lap; "I think Eleanor Taylor is one of those mannish girls who ignore their parents. I never liked her. She is distinctly fast."

"She is," said Miss Millington authoritatively,

"not *quite* a lady, and her manners are not *nice*. I believe her mother was an excellent woman, but we never knew her. Things are so changed now, and since her father was knighted she has had opportunities that one could scarcely have expected for her."

"And she's made the best of them," said Bella sourly; "it is a pity."

"What does the Dean say?" asked Daisy.

"Oh," replied Miss Millington, "the Dean has had a *great* deal to put up with from his nephew; he has suffered much, and he *is* so good about it."

"If he keeps on the shop," said Bella, "we *can't* call on her."

"Of *course* not, dear," replied Miss Millington; "*no* one will. Mr Horne has been looked upon as an eccentric, but *this* quite alters the case."

"I expect," went on Bella, "that in his heart of hearts Sir Daniel is really pleased about the engagement. The Dean's family is a very good one."

"Excellent," said Daisy; "but the shop constitutes a rift within the lute."

"Sir Daniel is *really* a tradesman," mused Miss Millington.

"Er—yes—but——" said Bella, and looked the rest of the sentence.

"Exactly, dear. Of course there is no comparison."

"It would be better if they both left Frattenbury when they are married," said Daisy.

"Yes," said her eldest sister, "it will make things very awkward for all of us. She won't be married in the Cathedral, will she? Of *course* she won't. The Dean would never allow it."

"Oh, he *couldn't*!" ejaculated Bella; "fancy the Cathedral being used for *such* a marriage!"

"*Quite* out of the question," said Miss Millington "How people would talk! I shouldn't be surprised if the Dean didn't marry them at all. I don't see how he *can*. If Mr Horne would give up his business, then it would be different."

"I wonder if they'll ask Canon Smith to marry them," said Bella; "he is more their sort."

A quick blush rose to the cheeks of Jane Rutland, but she went on quietly with her work.

"Yes, indeed," said Daisy, "he's *quite* one of their set—down to his socialism."

"He went out of residence this morning," said Miss Millington, "and dear Canon Jackson comes in to-day. We must ask him and Mrs Jackson to lunch."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Bella, "has Canon Smith been here three months?"

"Yes," replied Daisy.

"And I never remember such a perturbed three months since we lived in the Close," said Miss Millington; "we may breathe quietly now."

Jane set her lips tightly, but still said nothing.

"Depend upon it," snapped Bella, "there was

something wrong about him. Of course he's supposed to be exonerated now, but I think he came out of it very badly. And one *cannot* forget that he was content to go about in a *most* unseemly manner."

"Exactly," replied Miss Millington; "you mean at St Moritz? Yes, he was *not* the man to make a Canon of. Some low, east-end parish, where there was no society, would have suited his proclivities better. I shall *never* forget how badly he has treated the Dean."

"Aunty," broke in Jane in a low, clear voice, "please don't say such things about Canon Smith; they are not kind, and they are untrue."

"Jane!" exclaimed her aunt, turning towards her "I don't quite understand you."

"I thought I spoke plainly, Aunty."

"Oh! We shall speak of Canon Smith as we think proper!" exclaimed Miss Millington in a tone of awful rebuke.

"Not while I am present, please."

There was something in the girl's quiet, determined manner that caused the three spinsters to look at her in astonishment, and made Bella say angrily:

"It is not your place, Jane, as a young girl, to talk to us like this. I think you forget yourself."

"It *is* my place to defend Canon Smith against unkind attacks, and I don't forget myself at all," said Jane, blushing to the roots of her hair, but speaking with the same set determination.

"And what right, pray, have *you* to defend Canon Smith, as you call it?" demanded Miss Millington.

"Because," replied Jane, her voice falling lower and her breath coming and going faster, "because yesterday Canon Smith asked me to be his wife, and I consented!"

"——!"

"——! ——!!"

"——! ——!! ——!!!"

Such were the remarks that emanated from the three Miss Millingtons, and which speedily found echo in the sacred precincts of the Close of Frattenbury Cathedral.

THE END

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